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## Religion and Justice

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### Climate Justice

#### Essential to the Church's Mission

Daniel R. DiLeo, Creighton University

#### Abstract

This essay argues that climate justice understood as faithful, prudent action to address climate change is essential to the mission of the Catholic Church. The first section outlines Catholic ecclesiology, missiology, and theological ethics as a response to God who is love (1 John 4:8). The second section outlines post-conciliar missiological conceptualizations with focus on the controversy about “action on behalf of justice” surrounding the 1971 synod of bishops’ document *Justitia in Mundo* and subsequent preparations for the 1974 synod of bishops. The third section presents the causes and consequences of climate change and the fourth section argues that climate justice is essential to the church’s mission. Section four especially suggests how climate justice might be enacted by persons and communities through charitable works and social justice and emphasizes the need for both proclamation and spirituality. The fifth section highlights the importance of prudence to climate justice.

Keywords: *Laudato Si'*, climate change, justice, ecclesiology, missiology

## Introduction

In his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis identifies climate change as “one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day” (2015a: 25). Additionally, he quotes the Conference of Dominican Bishops to stress that “peace, justice and the preservation of creation are three absolutely interconnected themes, which cannot be separated and treated individually” (2015b: 92). Furthermore, he insists, “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” (2015b: 217). Taken together and against the broader backdrop of magisterial teaching, *Laudato Si'* can be read to assert that action to address climate change in response to God’s love is essential to the church’s mission. Although I believe this assertion is correct, my experience is that many U.S. Catholics seem ambivalent about or opposed to it.

In response, this article engages conciliar and post-conciliar magisterial documents to argue that climate justice understood as an expression of biblical justice that advances God’s kingdom through action to address climate change via charitable works and social justice in faithful response to God’s love animated by ecological conversion and spirituality is essential to the church’s evangelical mission and involves all Catholic individuals, communities, and institutions. First, I present a framework with which to broadly conceptualize Catholic theological ethics and engage Catholic ecclesiology and missiology. Next, I outline how the Second Vatican Council presented the Catholic Church’s evangelical mission. Third, I review post-conciliar controversies and conceptualizations about the mission of the Catholic Church. In particular, I trace the disputes surrounding the 1971 synod of bishops’ claim in *Justitia in Mundo* that “action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel, or, in other words, of the church’s mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation” (306). Following these reflections, I argue that climate justice is essential to the evangelical mission of the Catholic Church. Finally, I suggest why and how prudence is crucial to climate justice.

## Ecclesiology, Missiology, and Catholic Theological Ethics

Vatican II outlined an ecclesiology and missiology essentially grounded in enacted love. In brief, the church is a sacrament established by God through Jesus in the Spirit (1964: 1). The church is also the entire People of God (1964: 9) whose law “is the new commandment to love as Christ loved us” (1964; cf. 1965c: 11, 24) and whose corresponding mission is to advance God’s kingdom “of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace” (1964: 36; cf. 1965c: 43). The church is thus “missionary by her very nature” and “the proper purpose of its missionary activity is evangelization” (1965b: 2, 6) understood as the “announcing of Christ by a living testimony as well as by the spoken word” (1964: 17).

To this end, different members of the church have discrete but complementary vocations. Clergy are primarily responsible for “teaching, sanctifying, and governing” (Vatican II 1965a: 11; 1965e: 7). Nevertheless, clergy are called to exemplify the amelioration of suffering (1965c: 88), bear witness to the Gospel through their “conduct” and “lives” (1965c: 43), and “live in this world” with “zealous pursuit of justice” (1965e: 3). Similarly, the laity are primarily called

to directly advance God's kingdom through transformation of the secular world (1964: 31) but are also called to are called to "announce Christ, explain and spread His teaching" (1965d: 16). Additionally, ecclesiastical institutions – Catholic parishes, dioceses, schools, hospitals, nonprofits, etc. made up of both clergy and laity – can be understood as responsible for the church's mission through a call to institutionally advance God's kingdom in ways consistent with their ministries (Ahern: 5; Vatican II 1965b: 15). In sum, Vatican II indicates that the church's mission is evangelization of which both preaching about and loving action to advance God's kingdom are essential parts and for which all members are individually and collectively responsible. Put differently, Catholic ecclesiology and missiology can be understood in terms of a loving call from God that invites a loving response from all God's people who are the church (Himes 2017: chap.5).

Especially in recent years, Catholic moral theology has similarly been framed as a call-and-response dynamic rooted in God's love (Himes 2017: chap. 5; cf. McDonough). Within this context, Catholic theological ethics has developed resources that can help unpack Catholic ecclesiology and missiology thus understood. For present purposes, a six-point summary of the "schema" developed by Edward Vacek with supplements from other sources is helpful since it systematically incorporates multiple core aspects of Catholic theology (116-56). The first point is the claim in 1 John 4:8, 16 that "God is love" and is an important starting place since it identifies "the least inadequate expression" for God who is mystery (Himes 1995: 9, 1) and is the "first cause of all things" (Aquinas: I.44.1). The second point is the radical Christian claim that God loves each person and offers the gift of loving friendship with God. Here and below, the complex act of loving can be summarized as "willing the good of the other person and acting to make that good real for him or her" (Himes 1995: 110). The third point is the reality that everyone has the freedom to accept or reject God's self-offering. In the Catholic tradition, "the adequate response to this invitation is faith" (Catechism: 142) which enables friendship with God that is formally described as the theological virtue of charity (Aquinas: II-II.23.1) and is deepened and sustained through spirituality (Martin: 2).

The fourth point of the present schema is that one's friendship with God initiates conversion whereby she or he is transformed by and enabled to see, think, and live though God's love. As Vacek writes, "Union with God leads to union with God's loves" (143). The fifth point is that conversion enables – and requires – one to answer and express God's love in the world through morality and ethics vis-à-vis self, neighbor, and creation. As James F. Keenan points out, in what Aquinas calls the "order of charity" a person is first called to rightly-ordered love of self since she or he is the most immediate person whom one begins to see and interact with God's love (Aquinas: II-II.26.4; Keenan: 19-23). This is the self-love with which Jesus calls persons to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31) and enables a person to rightly love within the other relationships for which humans are created: "with our neighbour and with the earth itself" (Francis 2015b: 66). The sixth point of this schema is that repeated enactments of love cultivate virtues understood as "good habit[s]" that incline a person to continually seek the moral good and act rightly (Aquinas: I-II.55.2; cf. aa.1, 3-4).

Given this schema, two immediate points are worth nothing since they bear upon later sections. First, the framework's progression from faith through spirituality to morality "makes the moral life spiritual at its source and the spiritual life moral in its manifestations" (Gula: 53). It therefore addresses the Vatican II insight that the "split between the faith which many

profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age” (1965b: 43) and insists that the *fullness of faith* (Himes and Himes) requires morality. Second, although this schema provides valuable moral scaffolding it does not provide clear answers about how to love rightly vis-à-vis the relationships for which persons are created. The framework thus leads to the question, “How can and ought we, who have been loved by God, live?” (Vacek: 117). To help persons begin to answer this question, the Catholic tradition provides robust social teaching (DiLeo 2019: 67-77). As part of this corpus, the church insists that adequate expression of love requires two complementary types of action: charitable works that provide direct service to those in immediate need and social justice which reforms sociopolitical and economic systems, structures, and policies that impede or injure the flourishing of another (USCCB 2019).

In summary of this section, a Catholic approach to morality frames Christian life in terms of loving response to God’s loving call that essentially entails love of God, self, neighbor, and creation enacted through both charitable works and social justice. Since Catholic ecclesiology and missiology can be viewed as fundamentally grounded in the same loving call and response, the church and its mission can similarly be understood to entail and necessitate these expressions of love. Simply put, from a Catholic perspective the church and its mission are rooted in God who is love and require action to advance God’s kingdom through love of God, self, neighbor, and creation expressed through charitable works and social justice.

### Post-Conciliar Controversy and Missiological Conceptualizations

Immediately following the council, magisterial texts described the church’s mission as both preaching of and concrete action to advance God’s kingdom. Pope Paul VI asserted that “true to the teaching and example of her divine Founder, who cited the preaching of the Gospel to the poor as a sign of His mission, the Church has never failed to foster the human progress of the nations to which she brings faith in Christ” (1967: 12). Four years later, Paul emphasized that “the Church has always wished to assume a double function: first to enlighten minds in order to assist them to discover the truth and to find the right path to follow amid the different teachings that call for their attention; and secondly to take part in action and to spread, with a real care for service and effectiveness, the energies of the Gospel” (1971: 48). In the same year, the synod of bishops’ concluding document *Justitia in Mundo* declared, “Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church’s mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation” (306).

Three years after *Justitia in Mundo*, bishops preparing for the 1974 synod began to question the notion that action for justice is “a constitutive dimension” of the church’s evangelical mission. Bishop Ramón Torrella Cascante, then-vice president of the Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace and head of the committee that drafted *Justitia in Mundo*, argued that the term “constitutive” should be taken to mean “integral” rather than “essential.” This, as Charles Murphy quotes Cascante, was because justice is “something which accompanies, but need not be present, that is, strictly speaking, a true proclamation of the gospel could take place without action for justice” (1983: 303). In response, Juan Alfaro, S.J., official theologian of the 1971 synod’s attention to justice, disagreed and argued that Torrella’s reading was inconsistent with

how the drafters of *Justicia in Mundo* understood “constitutive” (Murphy 1983: 303-4). Similarly, Murphy describes that Vincent Cosmao, O.P., author of “constitutive” in *Justicia in Mundo*, intentionally employed the term to communicate that action for justice is *essential* to gospel proclamation since “the gospel itself, taken against its Old Testament background, is the proclamation of the intervention of God for the realization of justice” (1983: 301).

For Murphy, the pre-1974 synodal conflict over “constitutive” stems from how justice is understood:

If justice is conceived exclusively on the plane of the natural, human virtue of justice as explained in classical philosophical treatises [here Murphy footnotes John Rawls’ *Theory of Justice*], then such justice can only be conceived as an integral but nonessential part of the preaching of the gospel. But if justice is conceived in the biblical sense of God’s liberating action which demands a necessary human response – a concept of justice which is far closer to agape than to justice in the classical philosophical sense – then justice must be defined as of the essence of the gospel itself (1983: 301).

In short, if justice is understood biblically as “*fidelity to the demands of a relationship*” (Donahue 2006: 69) that, for Christians, calls for love which unites the church to Christ and advances God’s kingdom for which the church exists (Vatican II 1964: 9), concrete action to work for justice is indeed *essential* to the church’s mission.

Here, it is important to emphasize that biblical and philosophical notions of justice are not opposed. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops describe that “biblical justice is more comprehensive than subsequent philosophical definitions. It is not concerned with a strict definition of rights and duties, but with the rightness of the human condition before God and within society” (39). Later, the bishops write:

Biblical justice is the goal we strive for. This rich biblical understanding portrays a just society as one marked by the fullness of love, compassion, holiness, and peace. On their path through history, however, sinful human beings need more specific guidance on how to move toward the realization of this great vision of God's Kingdom . . . Catholic social teaching, like much philosophical reflection, distinguishes three dimensions of basic justice: commutative justice, distributive justice, and social justice (68).

Thus, and especially with respect to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ “Two Feet of Love in Action” (2019), social justice and other philosophical notions of justice are necessary but insufficient concepts related to biblical justice as faithfulness to God’s call for love in response to loving union with God who is love.

Following the 1974 synod, Pope Paul VI stressed that the church’s “deepest identity” (1975: 14) is evangelization that “proclaims a kingdom, the Kingdom of God” (1975: 8) through a “complex process made up of varied elements” (1975: 14) that are all “complementary and mutually enriching” (1975: 24). He emphasizes that “a clear proclamation . . . of God's grace and mercy” is central to evangelization (1975: 27) and then pointedly asks “how in fact can one proclaim the new commandment [of love that grounds the church’s mission] without promoting in justice and in peace the true, authentic

advancement of man?” (1975: 31). Paul seems to here echo the criticism in the Letter of James of those who would speak about love without acting (2:15-16) and follows his question by emphasizing that “evangelization proclaims and strives to put into practice” God’s liberating Word (1975: 33). In other words, Paul seems to affirm the claim in *Justicia in Mundo* that action for justice is essential to the church’s mission.

In 1990, Pope John Paul II marked the respective fifteenth and twenty fifth anniversaries of *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and *Ad Gentes with Redemptoris Missio* (1990b). Therein, he affirms much magisterial precedent. The church is the full “community” of believers (1990b: 26) established by Christ for the salvation of all persons (1990b: 9) and as means to God’s kingdom (1990b: 13, 20). To these ends, the church’s “primary service” to humanity is evangelization (1990b: 2) the “first form” of which is witness that includes “a commitment to peace, justice, human rights and human promotion” (1990b: 42; cf. 20). He also emphasizes that “working for the kingdom means acknowledging and promoting God’s activity” while “building the kingdom means working for liberation from evil in all its forms” (1990b: 15). He concludes that the “entire People of God” is responsible for the church’s evangelical mission (1990b: 71) which builds God’s kingdom through “witness and through such activities as dialogue, human promotion, commitment to justice and peace, education and the care of the sick, and aid to the poor and to children” (1990b: 20).

On the one hand, John Paul recognizes work to advance God’s kingdom as connected to the church’s mission. On the other, however, he appears to retreat from related episcopal teachings.<sup>1</sup> Paragraphs 58-59 occur under the heading “Promoting Development by Forming Consciences.” In the former section, he insists that “it is not the Church’s mission to work directly on the economic, technical or political levels, or to contribute materially to development. Rather, her mission consists *essentially* in offering people an opportunity not to ‘have more’ but to ‘be more’ by awakening their consciences through the Gospel” (emphasis added). In other words, he seems to reject the claim in *Justicia in Mundo* and subsequent episcopal texts that direct enactment of justice is essential to the church’s mission. Rather, and considering the previous quote from paragraph 20, John Paul appears to echo Cascante’s belief that concrete action to advance justice is “integral to” the church’s mission.

This vision, as Kevin Ahern describes, espouses as a relatively indirect approach to work for justice that, paraphrasing the work of Mary Elsbernd, “amounts to a reinterpretation of *Octogesima Adveniens*’s vision for collective social action” as essential to the church’s evangelical mission (106; cf. Elsbernd: 39-50). Furthermore, he also seems to prioritize charitable works relative to social justice. John Paul writes, “The evangelical witness which the world finds most appealing is that of concern for people, and of charity toward the poor, the weak and those who suffer” (1990b: 42). Only several sentences later does he follow celebration of charitable works with affirmation that “a commitment to peace, justice, human rights and human promotion *is also* a witness to the Gospel” (1990b: 42, emphasis added). Then he overtly declares, “It is in fact these ‘works of charity’ that reveal the soul of all missionary activity: love” (1990b: 60).

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<sup>1</sup> Here, I use “episcopal” rather than “papal” to emphasize that John Paul seems at odds with both prior popes as well as other bishops. The term is appropriate since the pope is so because he is the bishop of Rome.

In sum, John Paul in *Redemptoris Missio* seems to view direct action to advance God's kingdom as integral but inessential to the church's mission which should prioritize charitable works over social justice. Informed by Murphy's analyses, it seems that John Paul's relatively indirect approach to social action and the church's evangelical mission may be rooted in a relatively philosophical notion of justice as described by Murphy. Simply put, if John Paul viewed justice in biblical terms as fidelity to love that grounds the church and calls for both charitable works and social justice, he would have likely affirmed "action on behalf of justice" to advance God's kingdom through these complementary means as essential to the church's evangelical mission. Additionally, his vision may be due to an overly clerical ecclesiology that views the church as primarily constituted by bishops and priests whose primary responsibilities are "teaching, sanctifying, and governing" (Vatican II 1965a: 11; 1965e: 7) and only secondarily by laity whose primary vocation is to secular life (Vatican II 1964: 31). If this interpretation is correct, it is missiologically problematic in at least two ways. First, it ignores John Paul's own description in *Redemptoris Missio* that the church is the entire community of believers (1990b: 26) who are all responsible for the church's evangelical mission that includes action to build God's kingdom (1990b: 71). Next, it ignores the previous conciliar emphases that the clergy are called to enact justice (Vatican II 1965c: 43, 88; 1965e: 3).

Given the close relationship between Pope John Paul II and his successor Pope Benedict XVI, Ahern is unsurprised that Benedict's early papal writings on the church's evangelical mission closely mirror John Paul's (119). Ahern observes that *Deus Caritas Est* echoes the claim in *Redemptoris Missio* that the church's mission most directly entails charity and only indirectly seeks justice by shaping citizens through its teachings (Benedict XVI 2005b: 20-25, 28). Considering Murphy's discussion of philosophical and biblical justice, Benedict's claim that "the pursuit of justice must be a fundamental norm of the State" rather than the church seems to show that this vision of the church is animated by a philosophical understanding of justice (2005b: 26). Murphy (2007) in fact argues as much in a separate article and Benedict's own description of justice as work "to guarantee to each person, according to the principle of subsidiarity, his share of the community's goods" absent reference to love seems to confirm this interpretation (2005b: 26). Additionally, it seems that a narrow and overly clerical ecclesiology like that of John Paul also seems apparent: only if Benedict ignores conciliar emphases on the clergy's responsibility to enact justice or excludes the laity from his functional understanding of the church could he conclude that transformative work for justice is not an essential part of the church's mission.

Interestingly, Ahern observes that in *Caritas in Veritate*, Benedict undergoes what Lisa Sowle Cahill calls a "political reorientation" of justice (120, quoting Cahill: 297). Therein, Benedict says the church "has a public role over and above her charitable and educational activities" (2009a: 11). Although this seems to still prioritize charitable works over social justice, he additionally – and quite notably – references *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 31 to assert, "Testimony to Christ's charity, through works of justice, peace and development, is part and parcel of evangelization, because Jesus Christ, who loves us, is concerned with the whole person. These important teachings form the basis for the missionary aspect of the church's social doctrine, which is an essential element of evangelization" (2009a: 15, emphasis in original). This is a remarkable shift from his claims in *Deus Caritas Est* that the church's mission is directly concerned with charity while the state is directly concerned with justice. On my reading, and

again informed by Murphy's distinction between philosophical and biblical justice, it seems to me that this shift is largely due to Benedict's relatively biblical sense of justice in *Caritas in Veritate* which, as described above, is explicitly related to love.

Ahern argues that several of Benedict's subsequent writings did not advance what I view as a recovery of *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. While this seems true, the retrieval of conciliar and immediately post-conciliar ecclesiology and missiology has continued with Pope Francis's 2013 apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*. There, the pope echoes the centrality of evangelization to the church's mission (2013: 15, 23) and stresses this as a vocation to which all "the people of God" are called (2013: 119). Although this work requires dialogical preaching (2013: 127-28), he quotes *Evangelii Nuntiandi* to stress that evangelization calls the church to active transformation of the world that cannot be ignored without "distorting the authentic and integral meaning of the mission of evangelization" (2013: 176). Following this assertion, Francis echoes Benedict in *Caritas in Veritate* and John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio* when he writes that "the content of the first proclamation has an immediate moral implication centred on charity" (2013: 177). Shortly thereafter, however, Francis embodies the notion of biblical justice as an expression of love that Murphy argues is central to *Justicia in Mundo*:

Reading the Scriptures also makes it clear that the Gospel is not merely about our personal relationship with God. Nor should our loving response to God be seen simply as an accumulation of small personal gestures to individuals in need, a kind of "charity à la carte," or a series of acts aimed solely at easing our conscience. The Gospel is about the kingdom of God (cf. Lk 4:43); it is about loving God who reigns in our world. To the extent that he reigns within us, the life of society will be a setting for universal fraternity, justice, peace and dignity. Both Christian preaching and life, then, are meant to have an impact on society (2013: 180).

Similarly, in *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis writes:

Love, overflowing with small gestures of mutual care, is also civic and political, and it makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world. Love for society and commitment to the common good are outstanding expressions of a charity which affects not only relationships between individuals but also "macro-relationships, social, economic and political ones." That is why the Church set before the world the ideal of a "civilization of love" . . . In this framework, along with the importance of little everyday gestures, social love moves us to devise larger strategies to halt environmental degradation and to encourage a "culture of care" which permeates all of society. When we feel that God is calling us to intervene with others in these social dynamics, we should realize that this too is part of our spirituality, which is an exercise of charity and, as such, matures and sanctifies us (2015b: 231).

In summary, and after decades of movement, the papacy currently views justice in biblical terms as essential to the church's evangelical mission that requires love expressed through charitable works and social justice vis-à-vis the relationships for which humans are created and in response to faith animated by spirituality on behalf of God's kingdom. Informed by this



understanding, it is now possible to appreciate the claim that climate justice is essential to the church's mission.

### Climate Change Science, Consequences, and Causes

Climate change is widely regarded as an unprecedented existential threat that jeopardizes the future of human civilization (Miller 2016). In brief, anthropogenic heat-trapping greenhouse gas emissions have elevated the Earth's average temperature 1°C since the Industrial Revolution (NASA 2019a). Among other geophysical consequences, this warming has produced widespread glacial melt, rising sea levels, ocean acidification, droughts, heat waves, and other extreme weather events. Since warming and its effects can perpetuate current and future climate change through "climate feedbacks" (NASA 2019b)<sup>2</sup> whereby warming causes further warming, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) identifies post-industrial global warming of 1.5°C as a tipping point beyond which the effects of climate change may become runaway and irreversible (2018).

Under such scenarios, integrity of the non-human natural world would be ravaged by widespread anthropogenic species extinction and ecosystem collapse (IPCC 2018: 7-10). Since humans are creatures impacted by the non-human natural world, such runaway climate change threatens human civilization. Climate change already causes 150,000 premature deaths every year (WHO 2019) and between 2030 and 2050 could cause an additional 250,000 deaths "from malnutrition, malaria, diarrhoea and heat stress" (WHO 2018). Sea level rise, which could conceivably reach 20 feet (Dutton et al.), could contribute to displacement of 2 billion climate refugees by 2100 (Geisler and Currans). Especially in a world of increased drought-forced food and water scarcities, the scale of such forced population displacement would very likely trigger violence and political unrest that undermines peace. For example, research suggests that such effects of climate change contributed to Syria's civil war (Kelley et al.).

As with much ecological degradation, the poor are disproportionately vulnerable to and harmed by the adverse effects of climate change (Hallegatte, Fay, and Barbier: 217-33). In a cruel irony these communities are often least responsible for causing the climate crisis. For example, the world's five wealthiest countries in October 2012 by Gross Domestic Product in current prices USD (U.S., China, Japan, Germany, and France) were responsible for half (50.2 percent) of global historical carbon emissions between 1850 and 2012 (IMF 2019; WRI 2018). In 2018, G20 nations were responsible for 78 percent of global greenhouse gas pollution (U.N. Environment Programme: VI, 12). Similarly, future generations are vulnerable to the effects of climate change insofar as they stand to inherit a degraded planet with ills for which they are, by definition, not responsible.

Amidst these and many other geophysical and humanitarian effects of climate change, leading climate scientists suggest that runaway global warming could kill billions of people. In 2019, the United Nations estimated global population to be 7.7 billion (U.N. Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2019a: 1). Considering "probabilistic projections of total fertility and life expectancy at birth" (U.N. Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2019b) the

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<sup>2</sup> For example, ice-albedo feedback whereby glacial melt exposes relatively dark surface that absorbs comparatively more solar energy and in turn leads to further surface temperature warming.

U.N. expects global population “to reach 8.5 billion in 2030, 9.7 billion in 2050 and 10.9 billion in 2100 (U.N. Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2019a: 5). In a world with post-industrial global warming of 4°C, however, world-renowned climate scientists Hans Joachim Schellnhuber and Kevin Anderson warn that the geophysical and humanitarian effects would likely set the earth’s carrying capacity at less than one billion people (Climate Action Center: 9; Kanninen: 94; Fall).

Here, it is worth noting that planetary carrying capacity projection is an astoundingly multivariate process with a history of miscalculations (perhaps most famously in Paul Ehrlich’s 1968 book *The Population Bomb* which, among other things, incorrectly predicted millions of deaths during the 1970s and 1980s due to global food shortages amidst increasing population growth rates). It is also important to recognize that in the aforementioned citations, Schellnhuber and Anderson are quoted as providing their own inferential estimations that are not grounded in corresponding scientific modeling. Nevertheless, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warned prior to the 21<sup>st</sup> Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change that negotiated the Paris Agreement that “in most scenarios without additional mitigation efforts (those with 2100 atmospheric concentrations > 1000 ppm CO<sub>2</sub>-eq), warming is *more likely than not* to exceed 4°C above pre-industrial levels by 2100” (2015: 18-19, emphasis in original). Since then, the United Nations has estimated nations’ initial voluntary nationally determined contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement to be so weak that even with full implementation, “there is a 66 per cent chance that warming will be *limited* to 3.2°C by the end of the century” (U.N. Environment Programme: IX). In short, extreme global warming in the neighborhood that Schellnhuber and Anderson warn threatens billions of human lives remains a very real possibility.

Just as the Catholic tradition distinguishes between local and systemic expressions of love, the causes of climate change can be similarly categorized. On one hand, climate change results from individual actions that directly pollute greenhouse gases: driving gas-powered vehicles, using fossil-fuel powered electricity, etc. On the other hand, however, climate change is largely the product of political and economic efforts, structures, and laws that sow scientific disinformation and constrain individual choices through policies that encourage widespread consumption of artificially cheap fossil fuels and undermine the economic viability of renewables. This occurs through engineered efforts to question mainstream climate science and resist legislation that would directly limit greenhouse gas pollution, eliminate fossil fuel subsidies that depress the price of fossil fuels, and internalize the social costs of greenhouse gas pollution (e.g., the public health costs of climate change) into the price of fossil fuels. For example, Charles G. and David H. Koch spent \$127,006,756 between 1997 and 2017 to support climate science disinformation while ExxonMobile spent \$16m between 1998 and 2005 to do the same (Greenpeace; Frumhoff and Oreskes). Oil, coal, and gas corporations spent \$354 million on political contributions and lobbying during the 2015-2016 election cycle and received \$29.4 billion in federal subsidies during the same period (Oil Change International: 5). Five fossil fuel corporations – British Petroleum, Shell, ExxonMobil, Chevron, and Total – have spent nearly \$200 million annually since the 2015 Paris Agreement “on lobbying designed to control, delay, or block binding climate-motivated policy” that would reduce greenhouse gas pollution (InfluenceMap: 2).

### Climate Justice and the Church's Mission

In view of the foregoing, the causes and effects of climate change clearly frustrate God's kingdom "of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace" (Vatican II 1964: 36; see 1965c: 43). Since the church is called to advance this kingdom in faithful response to God's love through "action on behalf of justice" (Synod of Bishops: 306) understood biblically as "*fidelity to the demands of a relationship*" (Donahue 2006: 69) that requires charitable works and social justice inspired by conversion and spirituality, climate justice as loving action to address climate change in faithful response to God's love animated by conversion and spirituality enacted through the Two Feet of Love in Action is essential to the church's mission. Put differently through an extension of Pope Francis's affirmation in *Laudato Si'*, climate justice thus understood "is essential to a life of" fidelity to the church's mission for which all are responsible; "it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience" and the church's evangelical mission (2015b: 217).

To this end, Catholics as individuals and in community are called to take climate change mitigation action vis-à-vis the relationships within which humans are created to love and through the Two Feet of Love in Action. Although this will inevitably take a variety of forms, it is possible to outline the contours of climate justice understood in this way. For example, rightly ordered love of self is, as described, the first fruit of loving union with God. Within the context of climate change, rightly ordered self-love in the face of climate change calls individuals to cultivate an ecological virtue ethic wherein one habitually acts in pursuit of authentic good through habits like temperance which prudentially regulates the sensory appetite according to reason in response to God's love (Aquinas: I-II.61.2 and II-II.23.7; on ecological virtue ethics, see: Rourke; Schaefer: 231-54). This is especially apropos since Augustine described virtue in terms of rightly ordered love (XV.22) and important vis-à-vis climate justice since vices like intemperance cause persons to pursue excessive, carbon-intensive consumerism that produces both "internal deserts" within oneself and "external deserts" in the non-human natural world (Benedict XVI: 2005a). Additionally, and since Catholic communities responsible for the church's mission take collective actions the *teloi* of which can be understood to include communal self-love that entails "willing" and "acting" for their authentic good (Himes 1995: 110), climate justice calls these groups to mitigate climate change through actions in areas like energy management, endowment investment, and purchasing.

In addition to rightly loving the self through an ecological virtue ethic, fidelity to the church's evangelical mission also calls its members to individually and collectively enact climate justice vis-à-vis love of neighbor and creation. As described, humans are called to love all persons – especially the poor and marginalized. Additionally, humans are made for relationship with God's creation (Francis 2015b: 66) wherein humans "love nature" (John Paul II 1990a: 13) and express "love for creation" (USCC: IV.A.). In response to these calls – and especially considering how climate change now disproportionately harms the poor, injures God's creation, and may irreparably do both in the future – fidelity to the church's mission requires that its members enact charitable works and social justice to help mitigate the climate crisis. In climatic terms, the former includes micro-level activities that mitigate climate change while the latter incorporates systemic responses to address the climate crisis (Himes and

DiLeo). Formerly, Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* suggests actions like “using public transport or car-pooling, planting trees, turning off unnecessary lights, or any number of other practices” (2015b: 211). Regarding social justice, Francis suggests working to “develop policies so that, in the next few years, the emission of carbon dioxide and other highly polluting gases can be drastically reduced, for example, substituting for fossil fuels and developing sources of renewable energy” (2015b: 26).

Although both individuals and communities can take such actions, two additional points can help refine these reflections. First, individuals’ consistent expressions of love for neighbor and creation through climate justice can help inculcate ecological virtues that enable rightly ordered self-love vis-à-vis the climate crisis. This is because virtues are, as noted, habits developed through repeated actions. Additionally, institutional enactment of climate justice through expressions of social justice can be understood in two ways. The first are those *ad extra* that work to change public structures and laws in society. The second are those *ad intra* that reform internal institutional policies. While each is unique, both are important and should be concurrently pursued.

At this point, the reader may notice that while I have considered love of self, neighbor, and creation in my treatment of climate justice as essential to the church’s mission, I have not addressed love of God. This might seem odd since Jesus’s so-called “greatest commandment” begins with the need to love God (Matthew 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27) and because love of God in charity through faith deepened via spirituality precedes love of others in the above “schema” of Catholic theological ethics. However, this structuring is appropriate, even necessary, to sufficiently understanding love of God amidst the climate crisis. As Paul Wadell describes, love of God entails benevolence through which persons and communities act to “protect God’s interests in the world” (67). Since God is present in and among persons – especially the poor (Matthew 25) – who are harmed by climate change, love of God in fidelity to the church’s mission necessitates climate justice vis-à-vis self and neighbor as described. Additionally, and because the church professes a “sacramental view of the universe” wherein God is ever-present in all creation (USCC 1991: III) the integrity of which is injured by climate change, love of God calls for climate justice vis-à-vis non-human creation as outlined above. Finally, and since God is interested in advancement of God’s kingdom that grounds the church’s mission (Vatican II 1964: 36; cf. 1965c: 43) and is frustrated by climate change, love of God requires climate justice that works to build God’s kingdom “of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace” (1964: 36; cf. 1965c: 43). In short, amidst the climate crisis discussions about love of self, neighbor, and creation whom persons can see are necessary precursors to adequate dialogue about love of God whom persons cannot see (cf. 1 John 4:20).

While climate justice is essential to the church’s evangelical mission, it is important to recall that this mission requires action and proclamation. As referenced, *Lumen Gentium* described evangelization as “announcing of Christ by a living testimony as well as by the spoken word” (Vatican II 1964: 17) while *Gaudium et Spes* famously explicated that “the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel” (Vatican II 1965c: 4). Shortly after the council, Pope Paul VI similarly emphasized that in fidelity to its mission “the Church has always wished to assume a double function: first to enlighten minds in order to assist them to discover the truth and to find the

right path to follow amid the different teachings that call for their attention; and secondly to take part in action and to spread, with a real care for service and effectiveness, the energies of the Gospel” (1971: 48). Thus, while the focus of this essay is climate justice, it is important to recognize that fidelity to the fullness of the church’s evangelical mission vis-à-vis climate change calls for both climate justice and Gospel proclamation in light of contemporary challenges. To this end, proclamation can be understood as sharing decades of magisterial teaching on climate change (cf. Catholic Climate Covenant 2019a). Although this communication will look different for various persons (e.g. clergy who can offer liturgical homilies and laity who teach in other capacities) as well as institutions, it is nevertheless crucial to evangelization amidst the climate crisis.

In addition to satisfying the church’s evangelical mission, it is worth noting that such proclamation of church teaching could increase the likelihood of climate justice among those who hear it. Veteran climate policy negotiator Donald A. Brown argues that society has not sufficiently acted to address climate change because the issue is often exclusively framed in “value-neutral” scientific and economic terms that fail to inspire collective action on behalf of others (223-24). Additionally, theologian Erin Lothes Biviano suggests based on ethnographic research that persons of faith have not appropriately acted to address climate change because many do not grasp the complexities of modern ecological challenges and have been further confused by coordinated campaigns to question and undermine belief in settled climate science (61-64). Since magisterial attention to climate change engages both ethics and the physical sciences, promulgation of these teachings by individuals and communities – both *ad intra* to members of the church and *ad extra* to the world – could inspire climate justice among auditors since magisterial attention to this issue engages both ethics and the physical sciences. To maximize the efficiency of this activity, which arguably falls within the discipline of public theology that seeks to “discover and communicate the socially significant meanings of Christian symbols and tradition” to effect sociopolitical change (Hollenbach 1979: 714; cf. Himes and Himes: 4-5), communicators can tailor messages from and about Catholic teaching on climate change using insights from the social sciences (DiLeo 2020).

Although sharing church teaching on climate change might animate climate justice in fidelity to the church’s evangelical mission, it is ultimately necessary but insufficient without faith, conversion, and spirituality. In *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis references *Evangelii Gaudium* to argue that action on behalf of creation “cannot be sustained by doctrine alone, without a spirituality capable of inspiring us, without an ‘interior impulse which encourages, motivates, nourishes and gives meaning to our individual and communal activity’” (216). To catalyze and maintain such an interior movement, Francis stresses the need for an “ecological spirituality” (216) that develops one’s relationship with God and facilitates “an ‘ecological conversion’, whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them” (217). This vision corresponds to how the schema of Catholic theological ethics views morality as a response to God’s self-offering (faith) and transformative (conversion) relationship with God (spirituality) and ultimately “makes the moral life spiritual at its source and the spiritual life moral in its manifestations” (Gula: 53). Together, these visions also support Pope Benedict XVI’s contention that “the external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast” (2005a). Thus, the fullness of climate justice as an expression of biblical justice that advances God’s kingdom through action

to address climate change via charitable works and social justice by individuals and communities in faithful response to God's love and fidelity to the church's mission must be inspired and animated by ecological conversion and spirituality. This is true for both individuals, groups and institutions, and the full church and to these ends the Catholic liturgy is an especially important locus that requires further ecological attention and resourcing (E.g.: Yocum; Catholic Climate Covenant 2019b).

### Climate Justice and Prudence

The claim that climate justice as described herein is essential to the church's mission can inspire Catholics to more sufficiently address the climate crisis. As with the schema of Catholic theological ethics, however, the claim does not provide clear and obvious answers about how persons, institutions, and the whole community should concretely work to avoid climatic chaos. Paraphrasing Vacek (117), the claim that climate justice is essential to the church's mission raises the question, "How can and ought we, who have been loved by God, live" in fidelity to the church's mission in the face of climate change?

To sufficiently begin to answer this inquiry, the virtue of prudence is crucial. Prudence is classically defined by Aquinas as "right reason applied to action" (II-II.47.3) that "regulate[s] the means" to the end of moral virtue which is "human good" (II-II.47.6). As described, this authentic good from a Catholic perspective entails rightly ordered love of God, self, neighbor, and creation. With respect to climate change, general prudence thus empowers individuals to identify actions that promote climate justice. This is especially true of charitable works and important since, as described, clergy and laity have different but complementary responsibilities to work for justice (Vatican II 1965a: 11; 1965e: 3, 7; 1965c: 43; 1964: 31; 1965d: 16) and must discern which actions are most appropriate to their situations. Moreover, prudence can help the clergy and laity discern how to most suitably and effectively carry out their distinct but related evangelical responsibilities to share church teaching on climate change as outlined above. Furthermore, prudence is also necessary to help Catholic communities and institutions advance climate justice in fidelity to the church's mission for which they responsible. Here, *euboulia* is important since it is the virtue that perfects prudence by habitually inclining persons to "take good counsel" about potential actions (II-II.51.1-2). *Euboulia* can thus help community members dialogically discern prudential collective actions that enact climate justice to fulfill the church's mission. Relatedly, prudence and *euboulia* can help Catholic communities discern evangelical actions to share church teaching on climate change that supports climate justice.

In addition to general prudence, Aquinas identifies the species of "political prudence" as that "which is directed to the common good of the state or kingdom" (II-II.47.11). As such, political prudence can especially help individuals pursue social justice by directing actions to reform structures and policies that perpetuate the climate crisis. For example, political prudence might move Catholic to recognize the wisdom of support for a U.N. climate agreement consistently offered by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (2017a), Pope Benedict XVI (2009b, 2009c, 2009d, 2010, 2012), and Pope Francis (2015a). Political prudence might also inspire subsequent corresponding advocacy around, for example, the International Climate Accountability Act – S. 1743 (Catholic Climate Covenant 2019c). Similarly, and in tandem with *euboulia* as described above, political prudence can guide Catholic communities

and institutions to pursue social justice through similar action to reform sociopolitical and economic systems and laws that exacerbate climate change. As described, such enactments of social justice should include actions *ad intra* to reform internal policies and those *ad extra* to change societal systems and laws. In the face of what Pope Francis calls the “climate emergency” (2019), political prudence and *eboullia* are thus especially important to Catholic institutions like Jesuit colleges and universities that view themselves as concurrently called to adopt mission-based internal policies and act as “transformative institution[s]” in society (Society of Jesus: 36; cf. 45, 49).

Related to discernment of right actions, prudence can additionally provide a segue through which to employ the principles of Catholic social teaching as a framework for ethical reflection vis-à-vis charitable works and social justice in the context of climate change and fidelity to biblical justice. This is because such principles function as Thomistic secondary moral precepts with which persons can prudentially discern and execute right actions that cultivate moral virtue in response to God’s love (DiLeo 2019: 78-90). For example, one might commit herself to the Catholic social teaching principles of solidarity and the common good and come to recognize how they are implicated by climate change. In response, she might engage prudence to discern that fidelity to these precepts require cultivation and enactment of temperance by and through reducing consumption of carbon-intensive products (e.g., red meat). Similarly, one might commit himself to the Catholic social teaching principle that calls for protection of the poor, vulnerable, and marginalized and come to recognize that such persons and communities are disproportionately harmed by climate change despite often contributing least to it. In response, he might engage political prudence and discern that fidelity to this precept requires regular enactment of social justice through advocacy for a specific piece of climate change legislation. In so doing, he would cultivate the cardinal virtue of justice that “renders to each one [her or] his due by a constant and perpetual will” (Aquinas: II-II.58.1) of which social justice is a species of expression (Hollenbach 2002: 193, 200-203).

With respect to individual and communal expressions of climate justice through charitable works and social justice, prudence can furthermore ensure that climate justice engages and is guided by the best available science. For Aquinas, the intellect is synonymous with reason (I.79.8) and constitutes two complementary facets: “speculative intellect which directs what it apprehends, not to operation, but to the consideration of truth; while the practical intellect is that which directs what it apprehends to operation” (I.79.11). Together, these dimensions enable moral agents to pursue actions guided by truth and, through repetition, cultivate and operationalize prudence. Since science engages and pursues truth “within the order of natural reason” (John Paul II 1998: 9) prudence must, by definition, be guided by science where appropriate. Since knowledge of the best available facts is a pre-requisite to prudential climate justice, prudence thus necessitates ecological education regarding climate science.

Here, two points are worth noting. First, communication of climate science upon which persons can prudently act is a matter of justice understood Thomistically as giving what is owed to another. As Richard W. Miller describes, “It is unjust to not communicate to people the risks they are being subjected to. If you’re putting someone at risk, you have a duty to inform them of the risk and they have to assent to those risks. It becomes a matter of procedural justice” (Miller 2018). Since such philosophical notions of justice are, as the U.S.

Catholic bishops describe, important means by which to advance biblical justice (National Conference of Catholic Bishops: 68), communication of climate science relates to prudence, procedural justice, and biblical justice. Second, the *telos* of ecological education that communicates climate science must be heartfelt corresponding action. As Pope Francis emphasizes in *Laudato Si'*, “Our goal is not to amass information or to satisfy curiosity, but rather to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it” (2015b: 19). To this end, ecological spirituality is crucial since with respect to the schema of Catholic theological ethics, adequate climate justice is impossible “without a spirituality capable of inspiring us, without an ‘interior impulse which encourages, motivates, nourishes and gives meaning to our individual and communal activity’” (Francis 2015b: 216, quoting 2013: 261).

Informed by climate science and transformed through ecological spirituality, prudence can thus increase the likelihood that climate justice is informed by the best available science. This is especially so if justice is understood in biblical terms vis-à-vis love since, as Pope Benedict XVI underscores throughout his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, “Charity in truth, to which Jesus Christ bore witness by his earthly life and especially by his death and resurrection, is the principal driving force behind the authentic development of every person and of all humanity” (2009a: 1). More specifically, prudence can inspire action that corresponds to assessment from the IPCC that mitigating the threat of runaway, irreversible climate change will require “global net anthropogenic CO<sub>2</sub> emissions decline by about 45% from 2010 levels by 2030 (40–60% interquartile range), reaching net zero around 2050 (2045–2055 interquartile range)” (2018: 14) – actions that the IPCC recognizes “would require rapid and far-reaching transitions in energy, land, urban and infrastructure (including transport and buildings), and industrial systems” (2018: 17).

Conversely, prudence mitigates appeals to scientific uncertainty as grounds upon which to argue that the church should not enact climate justice. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration observes that “97 percent or more of actively publishing climate scientists agree: Climate-warming trends over the past century are very likely due to human activities” (2019c). Similarly, the thesis that present climate change is partly due to human activity is accepted by nearly all nations and the most respected scientific organizations in the United States (NASA 2019c; IPCC 2019). Furthermore, and well-documented, uncertainty about anthropogenic climate change is largely the engineered product of fossil fuel corporations like ExxonMobil, neoliberal entities like the Heritage Foundation, and wealthy conservatives like Charles and David Koch who have used doubt as a means to resist climate action that threatens their economic interests and political ideologies (Oreskes and Conway: 169-215; Klein: 64-95; Mayer: 243-277). Thus, as the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops assert, “prudence dictates taking mitigating or preventative action” (2001).

## Conclusion

The evangelical mission of the church calls Catholics individually and collectively to advance God’s kingdom “of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace” (Vatican II 1964: 36). “Action on behalf of justice” (Synod of Bishops: 306) understood biblically as “fidelity to the demands of” love (Donahue: 69) through which God’s kingdom advances via charitable works and social justice sustained in faith and



deepened by spirituality is thus essential to the church's mission. Since climate change frustrates God's kingdom for which the church exists, climate justice conceptualized as an expression of biblical justice that advances God's kingdom through action to address climate change via charitable works and social justice in faithful response to God's love animated by ecological spirituality is thus essential to the church's mission.

Since evangelization requires both action and verbal proclamation, climate justice that is the focus of this essay should be complemented by efforts from individuals, communities, and the whole church to share Catholic teaching on climate change. As described, such efforts can encourage and enhance commitments to climate justice and should be guided by empirical insights from the social sciences. Such catechetical efforts should also be guided by prudence which, as outlined, should inform all aspects of climate justice. Ultimately, however, climate justice must be rooted in "ecological conversion" grounded in spirituality that enables Catholics to recognize and respond to the claim that climate justice "is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience" and the church's mission for which Catholic individuals and ecclesial entities are all responsible (Francis 2015b: 217). In my experience, sufficient recognition of and response to climate justice as essential to the church's mission is sorely absent from Catholicism – especially in the United States. Fidelity to the church's mission, particularly given the closing window of opportunity to avoid potentially runaway, irreversible climate catastrophe, thus requires rapid efforts to help Catholics embrace and enact climate justice as essential to the church's mission.

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