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Care for God's Creation and a Vegan Diet

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Care for God's Creation and a Vegan Diet

Teresa M. Kochaver

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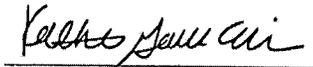
by

Teresa M. Kochaver

St. Norbert College
De Pere, WI

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
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of
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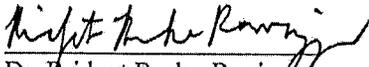
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Dr. Thomas Bolin



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Abstract

This paper will address the relationship between a vegan diet and the Catholic Social Teaching Principle of Caring for God's Creation. These two topics will be examined to set forth how the actions and outcomes associated with a vegan diet support and encourage a key theme of Catholic Social Teaching, Care of and for God's Creation.

This paper may also be a source of learning for anyone seeking a greater understanding of Catholic Social Teaching and information about a vegan diet.

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Introduction

A vegan diet embodies and most closely aligns with the key principle of Catholic Social Teaching known as Care for God's Creation, or Care for the Environment.¹ A vegan diet manifests the core Christian value and doctrine of caring for God's creation in multiple ways, including promoting common good, respecting the dignity of all life, valuing the integrity of creation, and improving human health of body, mind and spirit.

The components and cornerstones of a vegan diet are animal rights, environmental issues, and human health. The components and cornerstones of the Catholic Social Teaching principle of Caring for God's Creation are community and the common good, dignity of life, and integrity of creation. Moral and ethical dimensions go along with these three respective components for both subjects. Referred to as three-legged stools that provide foundational support for a vegan diet and for Care for God's Creation, the three respective components support each other as well. The argument will be that these two "stools" and their foundational components ("legs of the stools") are strongly related and provide support for each other.

Ill health and poverty are significant concerns in ministry today. Diet is a key contributor to these challenges. Incorporating a vegan diet into one's lifestyle not only leads to healthier physical, emotional, and spiritual states, but also healthier and more sound and sustainable management and care for God's Creation.

The argument that a vegan diet conforms with stewardship of creation, being a call to live one's faith in relationship with all of God's creation, if successful, can help fill a gap that exists in current Catholic Christian theology whereby dietary choices and their impacts to the environment, God's Creation, are rarely addressed.

The findings and outcome of this argument are important for pastoral education and ministry to improve health and well-being. This can encourage and assist church communities to be more discerning relative to diet choices and to adopt more redemptive eating habits. Community activities tend to center around food—it is hoped that this paper will complement and assist in the reasoning for making dietary choices that boost personal health and communal good. The Church can grow in leading community activities associated with diet improvements, i.e., community gardens, community meals, healthy food drives, and workshops on both cooking and caring for God's Creation..

The United States is one of the wealthiest countries on earth, yet the nation is beleaguered with ill health, poverty and environmental challenges. These outward, physical challenges indicate problems with our social, emotional, and spiritual nature. Catholic social teaching calls not only to heal the symptoms of poverty and injustice, but also their *causes*. A standard American diet (SAD diet) is one cause of these symptoms. Catholic Christians have a strong respect for the mystery of all life. A vegan diet supports the commitment as a Catholic Christian to not only love God and our neighbors, but to also treat our bodies as temples of the Spirit.

¹ *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, (Washington, D. C., 2006), p. 422-424.

This paper may be a source of reference and learning for health and wellness ministry. The evidence set forth in this paper shows a vegan diet can significantly impact and produce positive results for supporting the call we all share, as human beings, to care for God's creation.

This paper begins with an overview of a vegan diet and of Catholic Social Teaching. The connectivity between diet choices and the Catholic Social Teaching documents most closely addressing Care for God's Creation will be set forth. Relevant foundational documents of Catholic Social Teaching will be examined to identify how Catholic Social Teaching has, or has not, addressed the importance of diet as it relates to caring for God's creation. Building upon these findings that show a link between a vegan diet and stewardship for the earth, pertinent, contemporary theological approaches will be reviewed. Pulling these analyses together, it will be argued that although Catholic tradition and theology does not directly address the importance of dietary choices and how these choices impact the earth, there is theological reasoning and support for a nexus between vegan diet choices and caring for God's creation. The paper will close by providing the pastoral implications of the findings whereby implementing vegan diet choices improves health in both the spirit and body of the parish community.

Chapter 1 – Vegan Diet Overview

Why do people switch to a vegan diet? I say switch because it is rare to meet someone that has been eating a vegan diet since birth. Most people choose a vegan diet for one or all the following three reasons: personal health, humane treatment of and compassion for animals, and, lastly, care for the environment. Donald Watson (1910-2005) coined the term *vegan* in England in the mid-1940's. As a co-founder of the Vegan Society in 1951, he created the term *vegan* and described veganism as being “the doctrine that man should live without exploiting animals.”² Mr. Watson, along with other founders of the society, felt that it was hypocritical for vegetarians (those not eating animals) to eat dairy products and eggs because these products are, in fact, by-products of the meat industry.

A vegan diet is the main component of a vegan lifestyle, or veganism, which entails leaving out **all** animal products from both diet and lifestyle. A vegan diet consists of all plant-based products such as vegetables, fruits, beans, grains, nuts, and seeds, and dishes made from plant-based sources and products. A vegan diet does not include meat, fowl, fish, eggs, dairy products, and dishes containing any of these animal-based products.

The term *vegetarian* (no meat products) is older and more common than the term *vegan*. Vegan diets became more common in the United States as the industrialization of the dairy and egg industries developed and morphed into large manufacturing type

factories. For the most part, this resulted in inhumane conditions and treatment of the animals in these facilities.³ Many vegans will argue it is crueler to eat dairy and eggs rather than meat because of the conditions the animals endure while they are still living.

Of late, it is common to hear references to “plant-based diets” or “plant-based eating”. The term “plant-based” is not so clearly defined as vegan diet. It may mean just more plants or mostly plants in diet choices. Some people, including Scott Jurek, the vegan ultra-endurance athlete, feel there is a negative connotation associated with the term “vegan diet”.⁴ As such, some authors and nutritionists will use the terms interchangeably. This paper will use the term vegan diet as defined above.

In contrast to a vegan diet is the Standard American Diet (hereafter referred to as SAD). SAD is defined as a diet composed largely of animal products sourced mainly from industrial farms. The United States Department of Agriculture’s Economic Research Service published a report on trends of adult food consumption over a period of 1980-2005. The report states, in part, that the obesity rate has doubled in the study time frame.⁵ Daily dietary guidelines in the United States call for adults to eat the equivalent of two to three cups of vegetables and one to two cups of fruit. A 2015 study showed that overall, one out of eight adults meets the fruit recommendation, while less than one out of ten adults meets the

² <https://www.vegansociety.com/go-vegan/definition-veganism>

³ Victoria Moran, *Main Street Vegan*. (New York: Penguin Group, 2012), 14-16.

⁴ Casey Brown, Julia Mathew, Ilana Wolf, Ashley Kerckhoff, “What Does “Plant-based” Actually Mean?”, (*Vegetarian Journal*, Vol. 37, Issue Four 2018), p. 26

⁵ Hodan Farah Wells, *Dietary assessment of major trends in U.S. food consumption, 1970-2005*, (Economic information bulletin; no. 33) 1. Americans—Nutrition--Requirements. 2. Diet—United States. 3. Food consumption—United States. 4. Food supply—United States.

vegetable recommendation.⁶ Although food choices have increased, Americans are not meeting the Federal recommended dietary guidelines for healthier food choices. Nutritionally deficient diets coupled with less physical activity leads to poorer health and a higher likelihood for disease.

In addition to contributing to ill health, the SAD diet is supported by practices and industries that do not align with the Catholic Social Teaching principle of caring for God's Creation. Rather than focus on the negatives associated with eating a standard American diet, this paper will focus on the positive elements associated with eating a vegan diet and how those elements correlate to and support the Catholic Social Teaching encompassing caring for God's creation.

Contrary to the SAD diet, health benefits from a vegan diet are listed by Neal D. Barnard, MD, FACC as lower rate of heart disease, improved cholesterol levels, lower high blood pressure, lower to no risk of diabetes, lower cancer risk, and lesser likelihood of Alzheimer's disease.⁷ A recent study using the statistical technique called meta-analysis (the analysis combined 14 independent studies) determined those adults who followed a vegetarian diet had a 27% lower risk of developing diabetes than did non-vegetarians.⁸ This is significant in that more than 9% of United States citizens are diagnosed with diabetes.⁹

⁶ SH Lee-Kwan, LV Moore, HM Blanck, DM Harris, D. Galuska. "Disparities in state-specific adult fruit and vegetable consumption-United States, 2015". *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Report* published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 66:1241-1247 <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2017/p11116-fruit-vegetable-consumption.html>

⁷ Neal D. Barnard, MD, FACC, *The Vegan Starter Kit* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2018), 5-7.

⁸ Y. Lee, Adherence to a vegetarian diet and diabetes risk: a systematic review and meta-analysis of observational studies. *Nutrients*. 2017. June 14;9(6). Pii: E603.

⁹ Reed Mangels, PhD, RD, FADA. *Vegetarian Journal*. Vol. 37, Issue One 2018. P.12.

A significant nutritional benefit of a vegan diet is fiber. There is no fiber in meat or meat products, which comprise a large percentage the SAD diet. In addition to the nutrients they contain, being wholly plant-based, vegan foods are often lower in saturated fats and cholesterol and high in fiber. According to a seven-year study published in the medical journal *Thorax*, a 20 percent increase in asthma symptoms was found in those people who ate the most processed meat.¹⁰ There are many studies that support health benefits of eating more vegan foods--focusing on eating the non-processed ingredients themselves rather than processed and synthetic foods. The closer one eats to what is directly planted and grown and harvested from the earth, the more positive the health outcomes.

There are many common SAD foods that are vegan. Pasta, rice, cereal, fruit, vegetables, beans, and nuts are all vegan foods. Unfortunately, the SAD diet has evolved to a state where the good elements of food are cooked out and non-natural elements are cooked and added into the food. These processed foods and food additives are a problem in that our bodies are designed to digest and process the food that we eat to optimize the nutritional benefits provided by the food. When we eat food that is already partially or fully processed, the food does not follow the normal digestive cycle in our bodies leading to blood sugar spikes and plummets. Typically, this means we are satisfied for a short time only, being hungry again because the food goes to our blood stream so quickly.

¹⁰Zhen Li, Marta Rava, Annabelle Bédard, Oriane Dumas, Judith Garcia-Aymerich, Bénédicte Leynaert, Christophe Pison, Nicole Le Moual, Isabelle Romieu, Valérie Siroux, Carlos A Camargo, Rachel Nadif, Raphaëlle Varraso, "Cured meat intake is associated with worsening asthma symptoms", *Thorax* Mar 2017, 72 (3) 206-212; DOI: 10.1136/thoraxjnl-2016-208375.

In researching and explaining a vegan diet, most literature found contains references to the humane component as being an essential part of vegan diet. This component mentioned earlier as the animal rights component, is one of the legs of the three-legged stool of reasoning for veganism. Some facts about animal agri-business help with the context. From a dairy standpoint, like humans, cows only produce milk after they have given birth. Dairy cows must give birth to one calf per year to continue producing milk. The calves are taken from their mothers and penned in solitary crates to be slaughtered and sold as veal. This process interferes with God's creation of peace and wonder as the animals are merely treated as commodities rather than being cared for and respected as creatures of God. The 2018 Wisconsin Agricultural Statistics publication reports that over 75% of the cattle in Wisconsin are milk cows, calves, and dairy heifers.¹¹

As alternatives to dairy milk, there are many types of plant-based milks available at grocery stores. As plant-based products are catching on, there are dairy producers recognizing this progression away from dairy milk. The Plant Based Foods Association cites on their web site that almond milk sales have grown by 250% in the past five years. Plant-based milks can be produced from many sources, including almonds, soy, rice, oats, hemp, coconut, cashew, macadamia, and hazelnuts. Although the levels of environmental impacts vary for these plant-based milk products, none of them, even almond milk which requires large amounts of water and minimizes diversity, still cause fewer environmental

¹¹

https://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/Wisconsin/Publications/Annual_Statistical_Bulletin/2018AgStats-WI.pdf , p. 50

impacts than cow's milk. This claim is supported by a study published in the journal *Science* in 2018 that analyzed 38,000 farms producing 40 agricultural projects.¹² In New York, the largest dairy producer, Elmhurst Dairy, transitioned to Elmhurst Milked, an animal-free company that produces various types of plant-based milks.¹³ Dr. Cheryl Mitchell, Elmhurst's Senior Vice President of Ingredient Manufacturing stated that owner Henry Schwartz "realized there needed to be a shift into the plant-based sphere for both ethical and environmental reasons".¹⁴ Various types of Elmhurst's plant-based milks are available at local grocery stores.

Similar to dairy milk and milk products, there are many alternatives to eggs. A product called VeganEgg produced by the firm, Follow your Heart, is readily available. This plant-based egg product is a powder that is mixed with water to create "eggs" that can be used like eggs in any recipe, even scrambled eggs. The Follow your Heart company desired to develop a plant-based egg because of eggs' environmental and ethical impact. The thought being it was time to replace eggs rather than avoid them. One hundred VeganEggs can be made with the same amount of water used to produce one chicken egg.¹⁵ It is hoped that products such as VeganEgg will assist in reducing the amount of chickens that are raised in battery cages on factory farms. Animal advocates are hopeful that legislation will be enacted at the state and national levels to improve industry standards, conditions, and treatment of chickens in the egg industry.

In addition to compassion for animals, there is a need to address the impact SAD

¹² *Science* 01 Jun 2018: Vol. 360, Issue 6392, pp. 987-992. DOI: 10.1126/science.aaq0216

¹³ Rachel Krantz, "Dairy Downfall", *VegNews*, July/August 2018, 31-33.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 32.

diets have on human beings worldwide. Approximately 925 million people do not have enough to eat—yet the world’s cattle alone consume enough food to meet the caloric needs of 8.7 billion people. This is according to a 2006 United Nations document that reports more than half of the world’s crops are used to feed farmed animals, not human beings.¹⁶ Focusing on growing healthy food products for humans rather than genetically altered and chemically laden crops for animals is a good start for an incremental change to healthier living and a healthier global environment. The collateral damage being done to God’s Creation resulting from animal agri-business is hefty and hard to swallow.

Researchers at the University of Michigan and Tulane University studied the environmental impacts of dietary choices and found that 56.6 percent of the total greenhouse gas emissions from diet are from meat and the second highest, 18.3 percent, is from dairy. Vegetables, grains, legumes, and fruits each individually account for less than three percent of the total greenhouse gas emissions from diet.¹⁷ Using sophisticated data modeling, the study soundly concluded that less meat and dairy consumption is an effective way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

An additional example of the environmental impacts cause by the meat industry is a recent article published by The Vegetarian Resource Group on the water footprint of a vegan burrito vs. a meat burrito. Both burritos were measured based on the common ingredients of a wheat tortilla, corn salsa, tomato salsa, and guacamole in equal amounts.

¹⁵ Follow Your Heart, *The VeganEgg Cookbook* (USA, Follow Your Heart, 2017), 125.

¹⁶ Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, *Livestock’s Long Shadow*, Rome, 2006.

¹⁷ Martin C Heller, Amelia Willits-Smith, Robert Meyer, Gregory A Keoleian and Donald Rose, “[Greenhouse gas emissions and energy use associated with production of individual self-selected US diets.](https://doi.org/10.1088/1748-9326/aab0ac)” 2018 *Environ. Res. Lett.* **13** 044004 <https://doi.org/10.1088/1748-9326/aab0ac>

The vegan burrito added rice, black beans, and pinto beans and the beef burrito added black beans and beef steak. The vegan burrito ingredients have a water footprint of 225 gallons and the beef burrito ingredients have a water footprint of 541 gallons.¹⁸

A pioneer in promoting vegan diet benefits, The Vegetarian Resource Group was started in 1982 by Ernie Kopstein, a vegan medical doctor and Holocaust survivor; Norris Fluke, a vegan Senior Olympics swimming medalist; Audrey Fluke, a vegetarian nurse; and vegan activists Debra Wasserman and Charles Stahler. This nonprofit organization educates the public about veganism and vegetarianism and the interrelated issues of health, nutrition, ecology, ethics, and world hunger. The Vegetarian Journal is one project of the Vegetarian Resource Group and is published four times annually. A recent report summarized long-term studies (over 20 years) of vegetarians over the past 35 years finding lower rates of diabetes, heart disease, and BMIs, among other benefits.¹⁹

The data repeatedly show the negative impacts a meat-based diet have on the planet and the health and well-being of all creatures, humans and animals. Consequently, it is possible to relate this issue with the Church's social teaching. We pray, in part, in the Lord's prayer, "thy Kingdom come, thy Will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." This prayer of faith looks to the full establishment of God' Kingdom here on earth. It is possible to connect the positive outcomes from a vegan diet to the Catholic Social teaching principle of care for God's creation.

The pace of current American culture is based on fast speed and immediate

¹⁸ Jeanne Yacoubou, "Burrito on My Plate, The Water Footprint of a vegan vs. meat burrito", *Vegetarian Journal* Volume 36, Issue Two (2017): 15-18.

gratification. There is fast food to be had at every corner, it seems. Being mindful about food and its source, limiting the urge to overconsume, and understanding outcomes of diet choices are steps that can be taken for better health and wellbeing for all creatures and for a better environment. Consequently, this supports caring for God's Creation. Linking established beliefs with the actions and outcomes of a vegan diet leads to new ways of thinking about the present of God's grace in the world and how people can participate in building and renewing God's Kingdom here on earth. Learning how to eat is an important part of knowing how to live one's best life.

In his review of the Standard American Diet relative to spiritual fruits, Calvin College Professor, Matthew C. Halteman, (2013) argues that "unrestrained omnivorism" is not spiritually beneficial. Halteman's research demonstrates that 21st century Christian diets in North America have not evolved to be conducive to spiritual maturity. He argues that the current and mainstream diet actually contributes to "abet forces of degradation and injustice that are undoing creation".²⁰ Halteman points out the "advances" of farming and how it has negatively impacted the environment, quality of life for animals and those involved with the industry, and the declining health of the consumers who are eating the meat, eggs, and dairy produced by these "advanced" farms.

An in-depth assessment of the significant impacts of the world's livestock sector on the environment was published by the United Nations in 2006. The 390-page

¹⁹ Reed Mangels, PhD, RD, FADA, "Scientific Update--Long-Term Studies of vegetarians in the Past 35 Years" *Vegetarian Journal* Volume 36, Issue Three (2017): 28-29.

²⁰ Matthew C. Halteman, "Knowing the Standard American Diet by Its Fruits: Is Unrestrained Omnivorism Spiritually Beneficial?," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology*, 67(4) 383-395, 2013.

document reported that the former Amazon rainforest converted to raising animals for food since 1970 amounts to more than 90 percent of all Amazon deforestation in South American since 1970.²¹ This extensive global report provides detailed and comprehensive summaries related to impacts of livestock on the global environment, economies and cultures. The intensification and industrialization of livestock production for food has changed and impacted not only local farmers, but global environments, economies and societies.

This chapter has shown how a mainstream SAD diet can be disastrous for health, animals, and the environment and how following a vegan diet or incorporating more plant-based foods are choices that help all three areas towards a better condition. Author and vegan, Kathy Freston, proposes that “Even if Americans ate just one fewer meat dish a week, that would free up 7.5 million tons of grain, enough to feed the 25 million Americans who go hungry each day. If ten percent of the world population gave up meat, it would be enough to feed the estimated billion people who go hungry annually.”²²

Building off of these ideas, the next chapter will explore Catholic Social Teaching to better understand the fundamentals of Catholic Social Teaching and establish the basis upon which a nexus to diet choice can be supported.

²¹ United Nations, “Livestock’s Long Shadow” (Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, Rome, Italy, 2006.)

²² Kathy Freston, *Veganist* (New York, NY: Weinstein Books, 2011), 233.

Chapter 2 – Catholic Social Teaching Overview

This chapter provides an overview and history of Catholic Social Teaching. This chronological review shows how the evolution of Catholic Social Teaching led to the current “state of the state” whereby care for the natural environment is an important component of faith-based action. Caring for the natural environment, i.e. God’s Creation, includes care and well-being for humans, the earth, and all of the earth’s creatures. The fundamental understanding of the background and purpose of Catholic Social Teaching will support the position that diet and food choices are related to Catholic Social Teaching principles that address care for God’s Creation.

Catholic Social Teaching provides an understanding of where the Catholic Church stands regarding social, political, and economic issues.²³ The foundational documents of Catholic Social Teaching reflect the Church’s responses to the moral and ethical dimensions of the contemporary experience and culture at the time in which the documents are written. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states “The Church’s social teaching comprises a body of doctrine, which is articulated as the Church interprets events in the course of history, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, in the light of the whole of what has been revealed by Jesus Christ.”²⁴

Catholic Social Teaching is comprised of papal encyclicals, statements of Vatican

²³ Thomas Massaro, S.J. *Living Justice, Catholic Social Teaching in Action* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000).

²⁴ U.S. Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Crown Publishing, 1995). 2422, p. 641.

offices and commissions, papers from church councils, and papers from the episcopal conferences of bishops. Catholic Social Teaching is based on Scripture and Christian Tradition via texts issued by those holding official teaching positions in the Church. Catholic Social Teaching emanates from the Magisterium, the Church's teaching authority and official teaching office.

The United States Catechism for Adults sets forth the following definition and purpose of Catholic Social Teaching: "The Church's social teaching is a rich treasure of wisdom about building a just society and living lives of holiness amidst the challenges of a modern society. Modern Catholic social teaching has been articulated through a tradition of papal, conciliar, and episcopal documents. The depth and richness of this tradition can be understood best through a direct reading of these documents."²⁵ Reading the documents can take a lot of time. As an alternative to reading all of the documents, one can also look to others who have researched them to help figure out their purpose and what they actually are. As an example, Reverend Kevin McKenna, a Catholic priest and former president of the Canon Law Society of America, offers a very precise definition of Catholic Social Teaching: "A body of teachings issued by the Church, particularly since Pope Leo III's encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, which seeks to apply the Gospel of Jesus Christ to society's systems and laws so that people's rights are guaranteed."²⁶

In researching and reviewing the foundational documents of Catholic social

²⁵ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*. (Washington, D. C., 2006), 421-422.

²⁶ Kevin E. McKenna, *A Concise Guide to Catholic Social Teaching* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2002), .

teaching, it is necessary to categorize them for both the content of the teaching and the timeframe they were issued. The Papal encyclicals are all are deeply rooted in Scripture. They reflect the Church's response to the major world events impacting social, economic, and political conditions. It is interesting to see how the foundational documents reflect social doctrine of the times they were written. The encyclicals build upon and reference one another. The manner in which they are written still provides meaning for society and the Church today.

The foundational document that is consistently cited in literature addressing Catholic Social Teaching as the “first one” is *Rerum Novarum* by Pope Leo XIII (1810-1903) written in 1891.²⁷ This document is consistently referred to as the first foundational document of Catholic Social Teaching. *Rerum Novarum* addressed the social, political and economic challenges being caused by the rise of capitalism and the industrial age, especially the poor work conditions and the lack of just wages. It was a call by the Church for social justice. Following this first and forming document, nineteen subsequent papal encyclicals are considered foundational documents of modern Catholic Social Teaching. They were written by Pope Pius XI, St. John XXIII, St. Paul VI, St. John Paul II, and Pope Benedict XVI, and Pope Francis.

The springboard document *Rerum Novarum* addressed the challenges of industrialization, poverty, and urbanization at the beginning of the industrial age in the late 1800's. Industrialization impacted family wages and the rights of workers. 80 years later, in 1971, Pope Paul VI (1897-1978) wrote *Octogesima Adveniens* (A Call to

Action).²⁸ *Octogesima Adveniens* called for the extension of the teaching of the previous documents in response to the new social problems of the rapidly changing world. One of the problems addressed was the environment, with a call for action in response to the “...ill-considered exploitation of nature he (man) risks destroying...”²⁹

Moving forward another 20 years, 100 years after *Rerum Novarum*, *Laudato Si'*, (On Care for Our Common Home) was written by Pope Francis in 2015.³⁰ *Laudato Si'* addressed the need for caring for our common home—an answer to the environmental degradation being caused by the exploitation of the world’s resources. It is the first papal encyclical to explicitly address the global ecological crisis at length. The issues of ozone layer depletion, global warming, ocean pollution, and loss of wildlife habitat continue to be headlines in the world news as other countries grow and industrialize in a similar way the United States did during the 20th century.

Interspersed in the papal documents are two documents from the Second Vatican Council in 1965: *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World) and *Dignitatis Humanae* (Declaration on Religious Freedom). This makes sense in that Vatican II happened at a time when the Church was turning away from an inward, isolated “perfect society” to a more outwardly, embracing church that would integrate with of all of society through the grace of the Holy Spirit. There was a strong feeling of

²⁷ Leo XIII, Pope, "Rerum Novarum – Encyclical Letter of Pope Leo XIII on the Conditions of Labor" (1891). *Historical Catholic and Dominican Documents*. 13.

²⁸ Catholic Church. *Octogesima Adveniens: Apostolic Letter of Pope Paul VI to Cardinal Maurice Roy, on the 80th Anniversary of the Encyclical Rerum Novarum*. [Washington, D.C.]: The Pope Speaks, 1971.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 21.

³⁰ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Foundational Documents for Catholic Social Teaching*, 2017. <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/foundational-documents.cfm>

forgiveness and moving forward at that time. Ecumenism was especially important to St. Pope John XXIII and he saw a great need for changes so the Church could survive and thrive in its purpose while co-existing in the context of what was going on in the world, i.e., modernity.

In addition to the aforementioned papal encyclicals and Vatican II documents, the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB) provides a listing of foundational documents of Catholic Social Teaching that also includes two documents issued by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace: *The Church and Racism: towards a more fraternal society* (1989), and *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (2004).³¹ American bishops gather a few times annually at the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. Many times, these meetings result in the issuance of episcopal documents. The USCCB issued fifty Catholic Social Teaching foundational documents since 1971. Similar to the papal encyclicals, the USCCB documents cover a myriad of social issues relevant to the time of their issuance.

Catholic Social Teaching has addressed a myriad of worldly issues over a span of 120 years. Until the late 20th century, Catholic Social Teaching documents themselves were not readily or easily available to the public. The lack of attention to Catholic Social Teaching after World War II, how it had transformed over time, and how it was being presented in churches and schools led to the USCCB setting up a Task Force in 1995 to address these issues. This resulted in the issuance of a document titled *Sharing Catholic*

³¹ United Catholic Conference of Bishops, <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/foundational-documents.cfm> , 2019.

Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions in 1998.³² The 1998 document was in response to a perceived failure of mainstream Catholics and Catholic educators understanding or even being aware of the core tenets of Catholic Social Teaching. The lack of understanding was coupled with an American culture very much in need of moral direction and guidance. This is important to this paper in that the unbridled growth in consumerism after World War II led to much of what is addressed in this paper: unhealthy diets, disregard for the environment to the point of exploitation of the earth's resources, including its creatures.

The 1998 document states "Catholic social teaching can be understood best through a thorough study of papal teaching and ecclesial documents."³³ The work behind this document distilled volumes of historical social records and documents to identify and set forth seven core themes of Catholic Social Teaching in the United States: *Life and Dignity of the Human Person, Call to Family, Community, and Participation, Rights and Responsibilities, Option for the Poor and Vulnerable, The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers, Solidarity, and Care for God's Creation.*³⁴

The 1998 document provides a very helpful framework for understanding, discussing, and living the principles of Catholic Social Teaching and clearly defines and addresses each of the seven principles. These seven themes are closely related and closely connected to society and our culture.

³² United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions*. Approved for publication on June 19, 1998 by Monsignor Dennis M. Schnurr, General Secretary, NCCB/USCC. (Note: The National Conference of Catholic Bishops and the United States Catholic Conference were combined in 2001 to form the United Conference of Catholic Bishops.)

³³ *Ibid*, 3.

The Catholic Social Teaching principle of *Care for God's Creation* set forth in 1998 by the USCCB includes the statement: "The Catholic tradition insists that we show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation. Care for the earth is not just an Earth Day slogan, it is a requirement of our faith."³⁵ The Catholic Charities Office for Social Justice echoes the description of care for God's creation and further states: "We are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God's creations."³⁶

Reverend McKenna states that "as a community of faith, we are challenged to understand more clearly the ethical and religious dimension of the environmental issues. Catholic teaching in this area arises from an understanding of human beings as a part of nature..... Nature is not merely a field to exploit at will. We are not gods, but stewards of the earth."³⁷ There is a difference between "dominance" and "stewardship". Catholic Social Teaching emphasizes love and mercy. Translating Scripture to be more in line with Tradition seems to lean more towards stewardship than dominance. What God brought forth as the world is God's loving self-expression. A spiritual challenge of human beings is that of realizing how all of creation is totally integrated.

There is not a need to create anything new, but rather confirm, affirm, and document what is already true and align it to current context. The Catechism of the

³⁴ Ibid, 4-6.

³⁵ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions*. Approved for publication on June 19, 1998 by Monsignor Dennis M. Schnurr, General Secretary, NCCB/USCC.6

³⁶ Catholic Charities Office for Social Justice, *Key Principles of Catholic Social Teaching*, (www.cctwincities.org) 328 W Kellogg Blvd, St. Paul, MN.

³⁷ McKenna, Kevin E. *A Concise Guide to Catholic Social Teaching*. Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2002, p. 125.

Catholic Church states that “Each of the various creatures, willed in its own being, reflects in its own way a ray of God’s infinite wisdom and goodness. Man must therefore respect the particular goodness of every creature, to avoid any disordered use of things that would be in contempt of the Creator and would bring disastrous consequences for human beings and their environment.”³⁸

In 1993, Saint John Paul II (1920-2005) established the Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice (CAPP) foundation. The purpose of the CAPP foundation is to promote and implement the Church’s social teaching. This foundation was formed just a few years after the Pope issued the encyclical titled *Centesimus Annus* in 1991. *Centesimus Annus* is a foundational Catholic Social Teaching document and was written to recognize the hundredth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*. It restates the importance of the themes set forth in the first foundational document. The encyclical also points to the limitations of the free market that need to be addressed, mainly the fact that human needs and dignity may not be adequately addressed due to the prioritization of profits.

The CAPP foundation continues to be active in promoting awareness of the social teaching of the Catholic Church. In 2018, it celebrated its 25th anniversary in Rome. The theme for the conference was “New Policies and Life-Styles in the Digital Age”. One of the three themes identified and set forth by the foundation was “Towards a sustainable food chain: a responsible attitude towards disposable culture.” The Foundation plans to collect and assemble documents related to this initiative. The attention to food choices as

³⁸ U.S. Catholic Church, Catechism of the Catholic Church. New York: Crown Publishing, 1995. 1623, p. 452.

needing to be sustainable supports the attention being given to care for God's creation as a foundational theme of Catholic Social Teaching at the Papal level.

The foundational documents are not meant to be platitudes sitting on a shelf or in people's minds collecting dust, but rather they are directives and guidance for action.

This understanding is important to have as the next chapter will review and summarize main themes from the six Catholic Social Teaching Foundational documents that provide the most direct links and support for Caring for God's Creation. The themes from these documents will then be linked to their application to and alignment with the action of choosing a vegan diet.

Chapter 3 – Catholic Social Teaching Documents on Care For God’s Creation

This chapter will progress with a chronological review of the Catholic Social Teaching documents that most closely align with Caring for God’s Creation. The Church made, and continues to make, adjustments to adapt to the changing signs of the times and the relevant and prevailing cultures. Ever constant in these documents are basic cornerstone references to the importance of the good news of the Gospel, social justice, the dignity of human life, and common good. The chronological progression of the documents aligns with the evolution of world issues and challenges as the Catholic Social Tradition builds on itself. It is a living tradition.

There are approximately seventy foundational Catholic Social Teaching documents written since 1891 (Papal and Vatican documents and United States Catholic Bishops documents [USCCB]). Six of these documents, written between 1991 and 2015, will be reviewed in this chapter. The foundational documents chosen for review and support of this paper provide a balance between the Papal and the USCCB documents. They closely align with and address Care for God’s Creation and diet choices. The six documents address the negative effects human activities have had and continue to have on God’s creation. Issues relating to Care for God’s Creation, including climate change, previously called global warming, agricultural, and other environmental issues, came to be much more prominent in the 1970’s. The Catholic Social Teaching documents issued prior to the 1970’s aligned with the social matters of their respective time in history, such as industrialization, worker’s rights, and world wars. The review will show how the

information set forth in these documents align with food choice impacts, and further, reveal that a vegan diet supports the teachings set forth in the documents. These documents are a model for the link of vegan diet to caring for God's Creation.

1991-Renewing the Earth - (USCCB)

In 1991, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a Pastoral statement titled *Renewing the Earth*.³⁹ Even though this document is 28 years old, it is relevant to current environmental challenges and has an exciting energy about it. This Catholic Social Teaching foundational document refers to 12 prior Catholic Social Teaching foundational documents and to Scripture 24 times. The main goal of *Renewing the Earth* was to explore the links between concern for the human person and the earth. The statement sets forth the sentiment that all life on earth is a web and the Church does not allow for a choice of one (people) or the other (planet/environment), i.e., they are to be connected and included when making decisions and taking actions, rather than being mutually exclusive and independent of one another. This is one of the first documents to set forth the issues facing society relative to environmental degradation and suggests how the Church should be responding and interacting with the science and society on these issues.

Although there is no explicit mention of diet or food sources, *Renewing the Earth* stresses the integrity of all creation and how important sustainable economic and agricultural policies are to restore and maintain the environment. It cites the bane of

³⁹ United States Catholic Conference. *Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching*. Washington, D.C. United States Catholic Conference, 1992.

consumerism as one of the greatest sources of global environmental destruction: “A child born in the United States, for example, puts a far heavier burden on the world’s resources than one born in a poor developing country.... an American uses as much as twenty-eight times the energy of a person living in a developing country.”⁴⁰ In addition to addressing the symptoms of current times, it also provides suggestions that are tangible action items so as to “take up our responsibilities to the Creator and creation with renewed courage and commitment.”⁴¹ The nine action items listed in this statement include a call to theologians, scripture scholars, and ethicists to explore the relationship between “our Catholic tradition’s emphasis upon the dignity of the human person and our responsibility to care for all of God’s Creation”.⁴² The other action item closely related to care for God’s Creation calls for examination of our life-styles, behaviors, and policies. A suggestion for this particular action item is for celebrants and liturgy committees to integrate environmental care themes into worship and prayer—especially on feast days that tie into these themes, i.e., feast days honoring St. Francis and St. Isidore. The action items are all directly or indirectly related to food choices, how food is grown, and where it comes from.

2001- Global Climate Change - (USCCB)

Building on the continual and necessary improvements to consumer habits so as to help the environment, the United States Catholic Bishop’s published a statement in 2001

⁴⁰ Ibid, III., H., par. 2.

⁴¹ Ibid, V., par. 2.

⁴² Ibid, V. B., par. 5.

titled *Global Climate Change—a plea for dialogue prudence and the common good*.⁴³

This document builds upon 1991’s *Renewing the Earth* in that it emphasizes the same theme of unity of all created life and the integrity of God’s Creation. It also stresses the need for personal conversion and responsibility in caring for God’s Creation. This 2001 document addresses climate change with questions regarding the balance between technological advances and stewardship that protects the integrity of God’s Creation, offering a “distinctively religious and moral perspective to what is necessarily a complicated scientific, economic, and political discussion”.⁴⁴ As part of the religious and moral perspective, the bishops call for the integration of the virtue of prudence into Catholic thoughts, words, and actions. The document uses prudence as a guideline and model for modifications of behavior that will in turn lead to better care for God’s Creation and thus, ameliorate global warming. These recommended changes in actions (prudence) include restraint and moderation in using material goods, living a life less focused on monetary gain, and rejecting the false promises of excessive or conspicuous consumption.⁴⁵

Surprisingly, this document cites Scripture only once, in the opening sentence. It does not cite previous documents like most other Catholic Social Teaching documents do, but instead refers mainly to documents and writings by Saint Pope John Paul II (1920-

⁴³ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. *Global Climate Change—a Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good*. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Inc., Washington, D.C. Publication No. 5-431. 2001

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 2.

⁴⁵ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. *Global Climate Change—a Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good*. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Inc Washington, D.C. Publication No. 5-431. 2001.

2005). The time frame of this document, 2001, falls when Saint Pope John Paul II was nearing the end of his papacy (1978-2005). He issued eight Papal documents between 1981 and 1998. This represents one half of all the Papal documents issued in the 100 years since *Rerum Novarum*. In 1991, in *Centesimus Annus*, Saint Pope John Paul II addressed the rise of consumerism as one of the key issues causing the drastic degradation to God's Creation. He called for changes in our "established lifestyles" that marginalize and exploit God's Creation.⁴⁶ He further called to limit the wastes of environmental and human resources so as to cooperate with God in the work of creation, rather than making arbitrary use of the earth.⁴⁷ In the same way, subsequent Catholic Social Teaching documents built upon themes of changing lifestyles.

2003-For I was Hungry...(USCCB)

In 2003, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee on Domestic Policy published a document titled *For I was Hungry and You Gave Me Food: Catholic Reflections on Food, Farmers, and Farmworkers*.⁴⁸ The purpose of this document was to look at agricultural practices through the lens of Catholic Social Teaching. It is a lengthier document and covers all aspects of agriculture, especially the farmers and people impacted by progressing farming practices. The document sets forth warnings regarding pesticide and chemical use, genetically modified organisms, and confined animal operations. This document focuses on the farmworkers and how farming

⁴⁶ John Paul II, On the Hundredth Anniversary of *Rerum Novarum* (*Centesimus Annus*) (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1991), no. 42.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, no. 37.

⁴⁸ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. *For I Was Hungry & You Gave Me Food—Catholic Reflections on Food, Farmers, and Farmworkers*. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Inc.,

practices that are not environmentally sound impact the lives and health of farmers and farmworkers. It warns about emerging technologies being used for money gain rather than promoting the good of all people.⁴⁹ It includes many agricultural statistics from reliable sources. It is interesting to note the document even forewarns of the dangers of certain farming practices such as “the operation of massive, confined, animal-feeding operations”.⁵⁰ This is being realized across the country today as the large, factory farms that have commodified animals (and farm workers) drive more sustainable family farms out of business.

The final chapter of this document calls for a Catholic Agenda for Action to pursue a more just and sustainable agricultural system. This chapter looks at key policies, especially as they relate to poverty and the farm labor and includes stewardship of Creation. The document summarizes that the Catholic Social Teaching principle of Care for God’s Creation should lead us to question certain farming practices, such as confined, animal-feeding operations: “We believe that these operations should be carefully regulated and monitored so that environmental risks are minimized, and animals are treated as creatures of God.”⁵¹ Though structural change, will be slower, an individual can make choices about their own diet in a way that responds rapidly to the reality of environmental risk. A plant-based diet means grains can be planted for humans, causing less waste and providing more opportunities for sustainable practices which in turn offer more meaningful jobs.

Washington, D.C. 2004. ISBN 1-57455-603-7.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 31.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 31.

2004- Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church- (PCJP)

In the chronological review of the Catholic Social Teaching documents, it seems important to mention that in 2004, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace published the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*.⁵² This compendium was issued almost 115 years after *Rerum Novarum* as an attempt to update and summarize the church's social teachings to line up with the times in 2004. It is interesting that this document includes only six principles of Catholic Social Teaching. It does not include the principle of Care for God's Creation, which is included in all other publications and reference materials on Catholic Social Teaching reviewed for this paper. In addition to the six principles of Catholic Social Teaching, the 2004 Compendium document also sets forth seven major areas of social context within which the six social principles are applied. It is a voluminous piece of work and provides a helpful reference document regarding Catholic Social Teaching that heavily references past documents and encyclicals; there are 1,232 references and this does not include the copious amount of Scripture references.

The Compendium document sets forth the six social principles as "ordinary Magisterium" and identifies the seven applications of these principles as "prudential judgments".⁵³ Chapter Ten in the Compendium is titled "Safeguarding the

⁵¹ Ibid, 32.

⁵² Catholic Church, Pontifical Council For Justice And Peace. *x*. Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana. 2005.

⁵³ Spitzer, Robert J., S. J., Ph. D. *A Summary of Catholic Social Teaching*. October 2017. <https://magiscenter.com/a-summary-of-catholic-social-teaching/>

Environment”, one of the seven areas of application. The discussion in Chapter Ten most closely resembles and aligns with the Catholic Social Teaching principle of Care for God’s Creation. Instead of listing caring for God’s Creation as a principle, it addresses caring for the environment as a venue in which the Catholic Social Teaching principles are to be applied. This approach provides interesting insight in that caring for God’s Creation is to be a lifestyle. In a summary published on this document, Father Robert Spitzer offers as an example the need to keep a balance between the environment as a resource and the environment as a home.⁵⁴ This model will not be further referenced in this paper, but it does provide an example of how to implement the somewhat indistinct principles of Catholic Social Teaching in that they are not one-dimensional; diet choices that encompass the life and dignity of the human person, the common good, the option for the poor and vulnerable, the dignity of work and rights of workers, rights and responsibilities and solidarity. All of these principles can be addressed when making a food choice that is in the best interests of caring for God’s Creation.

2009-*Caritas in Veritate*-(Pope Benedict XVI)

Moving forward, in 2009, Pope Benedict XVI issued the encyclical titled *Caritas in Veritate*.⁵⁵ This is translated in English to be *Charity in Truth*, meaning truth-filled love. This encyclical focuses on truth and how truth relates to technological developments and progress as they impact the common good of humankind. Truth can be expressed as conformity with God’s will or plan—for all individuals and communities.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 29.

⁵⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas In Veritate*, Encyclical Letter, Copyright 2009 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

Charity is described as “the synthesis of the entire Law”.⁵⁶ The two are inexorably linked to each other and when society treats them separately, they can be misconstrued and treated in an arbitrary manner. This type of tension is often seen in theological writings where there needs to be balance and equity with both principles or matters being discussed. In this case, truth is the light that gives meaning and value to charity and charity needs to be enlightened by truth so it can be absolute and not relative to the times or sentiments: “The Church’s social doctrine illuminates with an unchanging light the new problems that are constantly emerging.”⁵⁷ The current problem addressed in this paper is how diet choices influence our stewardship of the planet, people, and all of Creation. As such, this encyclical addresses truth and charity in light of justice and the common good. Pope Benedict XVI emphasizes that common good is for everyone, not just some. Facts and science relating to how food is produced and the impact on the environment and people and animals need to be addressed and integrated with our faith. f Like other encyclicals, *Caritas in Veritate* also references many of the previous encyclicals and the Vatican II documents; the building blocks of Church Tradition continue to be mortared into place. The Truth that is grounded in Scripture and Tradition can be used in all times and in social, juridical, cultural, political, and economic fields, basically societal issues and challenges.

Caritas in Veritate addresses the problems of consumerism, workers’ rights, rights for life, profits that create poverty, and food insecurity mainly caused by the rapid progression of technological developments. It seems that economic and technological

⁵⁶ Ibid, 2.

developments ran past and left behind the good for which they were initially most likely intended. The “good” being the common good for all communities and not just for the capital gain of a select few by making indiscriminate use of the earth rather than cooperating with God in the work of all Creation.

Chapter four of *Caritas in Veritate* specifically addresses responsibility for the environment and care for God’s Creation. This chapter emphasizes the need for humankind to be responsible in the stewardship over nature and the environment. This means that stewardship of God’s Creation does not equate to overuse and abuse. The focus on the integrity of creation means there is no stand-alone activity relative to the ecological system that does not impact in some way or another strand of life woven in the web of Gods created world. Pope Benedict XVI succinctly states, “What is needed is an effective shift in mentality which can lead to the adoption of new life-styles in which the quest for truth, beauty, goodness and communion with others for the sake of common growth are the factors which determine consumer choices, savings and invests.”⁵⁸ A vegan diet or more plant-based foods in diet are choices one can make to adopt a new “life-style”.

2015-Laudato Si’- (Pope Francis)

The sixth and last Catholic Social Teaching document reviewed in this lineage of documents most closely relating to care for God’s Creation is *Laudato Si’*⁵⁹, an encyclical issued by Pope Francis in 2015. Pope Francis addresses caring for “our

⁵⁷ Ibid, 12.

⁵⁸ Ibid, par. 51.

⁵⁹ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, Encyclical Letter of the Holy Father Francis on Care for our Common Home

common home” and how the current state of unbridled growth (progress) is impacting the earth. *Laudato Si’* contains a lot of references to previous encyclicals, Scripture, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and many references to St. Francis of Assisi. Pope Francis ends the encyclical with a Chapter addressing the need for education. This is the first papal encyclical dealing solely with the environment.

Laudato Si’ offers a strong stand against anthropocentrism and stresses humankind’s close connection with the rest of Creation, i.e., integrity of creation. Pope Francis cites, verbatim, #339 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church: “Each creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection..... Each of the various creatures, willed in its own being, reflects in its own way a ray of God’s infinite wisdom and goodness. Humans must therefore respect the particular goodness of every creature, to avoid any disordered use of things”.⁶⁰ *Laudato Si’* speaks to the idea that “dominion”, as in human’s dominion over animals and the environment, does **not** mean using and taking advantage of them, but rather taking care of and tending to their best interests. The ideas and themes set forth in this encyclical address the need to return to stewardship of the earth (God’s Creation) from the current state of commodification prevalent in our culture of consumerism. Unfortunately, consumerism limits human development and growth as it does not teach society how to get along and do more with less.

Regarding the state of today’s technological advances, Pope Francis states that “Never has humanity had such power over itself, yet nothing ensures that it will be used

(Vatican City, 2015, www.usccb.org).

⁶⁰ Ibid, Chapter 2, II. #69, 51.

wisely, particularly when we consider how it is currently being used”.⁶¹ The Pope calls for education to help society develop new habits that will overcome individualization. He challenges the readers to examine our lifestyles and make better choices which will improve personal health, the environment, and the integrity of Creation. A vegan diet is a choice which supports all of three.

Chapter 3 Summary

While Catholic Social Teaching is a well-established Tradition, there is little to no explicit mention of human diet or food choices in its documents. The documents most closely addressing Care for God’s Creation do not address diet directly. However, it is possible to explain how choosing a vegan diet supports caring for God’s Creation by improving personal health, furthering the humane treatment of and compassion for animals, and respecting the dignity of life—all life and the integrity of Creation. The moral principle of Caring for God’s Creation can be applied by adopting a vegan diet. This is a concrete and simple way to protect the planet while living our faith in relationship with all of God’s Creation.⁶² Respecting the mystery of all life and all of God’s Creation requires that one be mindful of their behaviors. We show respect for the Creator by good stewardship of His Creation. All of Creation is divinely connected. The dignity of life extends to all Creations.

The body of teachings issued by the Church known as Catholic Social Teaching “seek to apply the Gospel of Jesus Christ to society’s systems and laws so that people’s

⁶¹ Ibid, Chapter 3, I. #104, 77.

⁶² United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions*. Approved for publication on June 19, 1998 by Monsignor Dennis M. Schnurr, General

rights are guaranteed.”⁶³ Reverend McKenna likens the environmental crisis of today to moral challenge. In caring for God’s Creation, there needs to be an examination of the ethical dimension of the environmental challenges. One of these dimensions is where our food comes from, i.e., what we eat. It makes sense to grow food for humans and move towards a plant-based diet. Care of God’s Creation is based on Scripture and on Tradition. The heading for the Catechism of the Catholic Church, #2415-2418 is “Respect for the Integrity of Creation.” The integrity of God’s Creation means ALL of God’s Creation, not just pieces and parts of it that humans arbitrarily deem to be more important or less important. All of God’s Creation should be treated with respect. This is what Pope Francis points to when using the language of ecology in *Laudato Si’*.

The next chapter will review current Catholic theology regarding Care for God’s Creation by exploring the approaches of a few contemporary theologians actively addressing the environment and animals in their writings.

Secretary, NCCB/USCC.

⁶³ McKenna, Kevin E. *A Concise Guide to Catholic Social Teaching*. Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2002, p. 158.

Chapter 4 – Contemporary Catholic Theology relative to Care for God’s Creation

This chapter will examine how certain current Catholic theologians view the principle of Caring for God’s Creation. I will reflect upon how their work contributes to the theology on Care for God’s Creation, specifically as it may relate to dietary choices.

My research revealed the foremost current Catholic theological approach relative to Care for God’s Creation is found in the writings of Elizabeth A. Johnson, a member of the Sisters of Saint Joseph and a Distinguished Professor of Theology Emerita at Fordham University. This chapter will focus on Johnson’s theology as her works set forth theology associated with care for God’s Creation. Johnson’s theology of Care for God’s Creation trends towards looking at the Living God’s relationship to the world, not only at the time of the creation of the world, but today as well. She looks for and studies the mystery of God in ways that align with the current times and current culture. In examining the relationship between God and God’s creation in different ways through different filters, Johnson creatively and inquisitively sets forth unique ways of understanding the importance of the integrity of God’s creation. Early in her writings, Johnson focused on how one can limit God by seeing God in an exclusive manner, such as seeing God only as a male. Johnson’s style of expansive theology leads to more inclusive and diverse thinking, while keeping with the Church’s Tradition and Scripture.

It seems that Johnson has always held a special respect for creation as evidenced in her 1990, classic book on Christology, *Consider Jesus—Waves of Renewal in*

Christology.⁶⁴ She includes a chapter on the Salvation of the Whole World and in this chapter, Johnson eloquently states the following:

“The story of Jesus is recalled once again to empower conversion from the greed and disrespect which lead people to rape the earth for profit. Jesus’ vision of the reign of God includes wholeness and *shalom* for all creatures, even the least important in the present hierarchy of values, the nonhuman.”⁶⁵

Although not explicitly, this theology relates back to the Catholic Social Teaching documents heretofore reviewed, whereby humankind is called to cooperate with God’s creation rather than dominate it. Andrew Tardiff, professor at Rhode Island College, in a 1998 article published in *Faith And Philosophy*, presents an argument aligning with Johnson’s above-mentioned theology. In “A Catholic Case For Vegetarianism”⁶⁶, Tardiff builds a case based on the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas and on principles of the Catechism of the Catholic Church that “obligates” a Vegetarian diet. Using Aquinas’ theory that acts need to be proportional to the end, Tardiff argues that humans should choose a dietary option that represents the least destruction of good possible under the circumstances.⁶⁷

Tardiff builds on this position by using the official Church teaching set forth in Catechism of the Catholic Church, § 2415 through 2418.⁶⁸ Tardiff summarizes these four

⁶⁴ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Consider Jesus—Waves of Renewal in Christology*. Crossroad Publishing Company, 1990.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 140.

⁶⁶ Andrew Tardiff, “A Catholic Case for Vegetarianism,” *Faith And Philosophy*, Vol. 15 No. 2, April 1998.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 212.

⁶⁸ U.S. Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (New York, NY: Crown Publishing, 1995), 640.

paragraphs by tying it back to the *need* for killing animals for food: “killing or causing animals to suffer when there is no need is certainly a violation of one’s duty of kindness”⁶⁹. In a nutshell, Tardiff argues the case for vegetarianism since it is wrong to do more than necessary violence. If there are options that do not entail the killing of animals for food, Tardiff argues Catholics are “obligated” to choose the least violent and most kind choice. Today’s food choices in America offer a multitude of healthy, economical, and kind choices that fit this obligation.

Today’s culture in America is becoming more open to ideas and dialogue that embrace environmental awareness and restoring the health of the planet. Elizabeth Johnson’s theological style of questioning and engaging in dialogue sets forth the repeated pattern of growing into the mystery of God and thus into the saving grace of Jesus Christ which leads to a sense of gratitude and wonder. Johnson argues that true dialogue is not possible if one side starts out presuming to know the truth. She further argues that not to pursue questions is not to go with the flow of God’s grace. Johnson summarizes this idea in her 2007 book, *Quest for the Living God—Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God*⁷⁰, as follows: “The challenge facing us is whether we will suffocate in the tiny hut of own shrewdness, or advance through the door of our knowing and acting into the uncharted, unending adventure of exploration into God, whose silent immensity we can trust absolutely and love through care for this world.”⁷¹ Appreciation and respect for caring where our food comes from and how it is produced circles back to

⁶⁹ Tardiff, 220.

⁷⁰ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Quest For The Living God—Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God*. (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2007).

caring for God’s creation. Having open dialogue and sharing information in a loving and kind manner helps move along incremental change relative to moving towards a healthier diet, leading to a healthier planet and thus respecting and caring for God’s creation.

It is interesting to look back to the status of Catholic Social Teaching documents in 1990 that covered issues relative to the principle of Care for God’s Creation. The first documents dealing with creation and ecological issues came first from the United States Catholic Bishops Documents in 1991 and 2001, followed by Vatican and Papal documents in 2002. In reviewing the focus of these documents, there is a pattern of focus on the human person and communities, which is wonderful, however collateral damages to the earth resulting from the growth of global economies and consumerism seem to take a while to get attention in the documents. Johnson summarized this point in a 2015 lecture where she stated, “we have done theology looking in the mirror at ourselves, now it is time to look out the window to see that we are part of a bigger world”.⁷² Johnson makes the point that God’s mercy is broad enough for all creation and not just for human beings. She suggests that we stop ignoring the impacts our lifestyles and choices have on God’s creation.

In her book, *Abounding in Kindness—Writing for the People of God*,⁷³ published in 2015, Johnson’s main theme is the overflowing compassion and fidelity of the Living God. The book’s title of *Abounding in Kindness* is based on Psalm 103:8: “The Lord is

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 46.

⁷² Heidi Schlumpf, “Is God’s Charity broad Enough for Bears” (blog post), National Catholic Reporter, June 11, 2015, <http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/gods-charity-broad-enough-bears>.

⁷³ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Abounding in Kindness—Writings for the People of God*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2015.

merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.”⁷⁴ In this book, Johnson introduces ecological awareness as a new dialogue partner for theology.⁷⁵ Johnson’s theological approach set forth in this book fills in some of the gaps found in traditional theology relative to Caring for God’s Creation. She cites five reasons for why traditional theology left out creation, the main one being that western theology has overtly focused on human beings. This was based on the early Christian encounter with Hellenistic philosophy which separated spirit from matter and relegated plants and animals to belonging solely to the earth and therefore much less important.⁷⁶ Other factors were the medieval distinction between the natural and supernatural, the focus on the human need for salvation stemming from the reformation, the imperialism and colonialism in the post-Enlightenment world that focused on dominion, along with neglect of the Holy Spirit all contributed to theology’s exclusive focus on humans in modern times.

Johnson’s reasoning regarding the lack of theology for caring for God’s creation parallels with reasoning set forth in a 2018 article published in “*The Ark*”, *The Magazine of Catholic Concern for Animals*.⁷⁷ The article, written by Dr. Richard Ryder, discusses four main historical sources for Christian Speciesism: diet and the dominion factor over animals, vested interests for money and profit—commodification of animals and the earth, the Roman culture being based on conquest and domination, and lastly, the

⁷⁴ *The Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

⁷⁵ Johnson, p. 79.

⁷⁶ Johnson, 101.

⁷⁷ Dr. Richard Ryder. “Campaigning for Painism and against Speciesism,” *The Ark-The Magazine of Catholic Concern for Animals*, Issue No. 240, Autumn 2018.

influence of Aristotle on early Christian writings. These reasons set forth by Johnson and Ryder appear to have led to a separation between matter and spirit, i.e., earth is here, and God is there. To mend this disunifying situation, Johnson introduces the idea of a theology of “continuous creation” to build a strong foundation upon which the integrity of creation is paramount. All of creation is God’s work and when there is damage to any part of creation, there is separation from God. In the same way, a vegan diet lessens damage to multiple parts of God’s creation: animals, the environment, and human health.

Johnson continues in her theological evolution in her 2014 book, *Ask the Beasts*,⁷⁸ where she argues that ecological care is at the center of a moral life. In this book she argues for the community of creation being treated with a sense of stewardship rather than dominion. She also states that God has put two sources of learning at our disposal: Scripture and Nature. The discourse in this book blends science and theology forming an ecological theology imparting the sense that we are all part of a whole. The unity and integrity of all creation is God’s intent with and through Jesus Christ in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Johnson reaffirms that “Christian social teaching about the common good underscores the need to change not just individual behaviors but social structures that create misery.”⁷⁹ This ideal certainly is supported by plant-based food choices that minimize negative impacts to the environment, human health and animal exploitation.

This brings us to Johnson’s most recent book, *Creation and the Cross—The*

⁷⁸ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love*. London, GB: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2014.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 282.

*Mercy of God for a Planet in Peril*⁸⁰, published in 2018. Johnson revisits and examines how a view of salvation that is focused narrowly on human beings be expanded to a theology that includes God’s redemptive mercy extending to and blessing all of creation. This book mirrors the conversations Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) had with his student, Boso, with Johnson taking the role of Anselm and her student, Clara (who represents all of us), taking the role of Boso. Johnson works through turning Anselm’s satisfaction theory into a theory or theology of accompaniment which anchors her ecological approach to understanding salvation. “A theology of accompaniment holds the faith conviction that God forever companions the world with liberating, saving mercy.....within this overall framework, we can interpret the cross as a particular event of divine solidarity with the suffering and death of all creatures and species in the evolving world.”⁸¹ Johnson expands the incarnation to be more than a human being, but that of flesh that includes all of life and all of God’s creation. This gives hope and direction to the challenges we are facing in caring for God’s creation.

The final chapter of Johnson’s latest book provides many citations to Scripture and to the latest encyclical issued by Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*. As was mentioned in the last chapter, Pope Francis is a prominent Catholic voice encouraging Care for God’s Creation. The Pope’s theology is very similar to his namesake, St. Francis of Assisi, in that his writing and communications seem to find and see God in all things. This aligns with Johnson’s argument that the God who saves is the same God who creates.

⁸⁰ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Creation and the Cross—The Mercy of God for a Planet of Peril*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2018.

Johnson's most recent writings, in conjunction with Pope Francis' encyclical, indicate the Church's movement towards a more inclusive theology that embraces ALL of God's creation, looking outward in relationship with the entire global community.

A lesser known and less conventional Catholic theologian is the English author, Deborah Jones. Jones is the general secretary of Great Britain's Catholic Concern for Animals and holds a doctorate in animal theology from Wales University. In her 2009 book, *The School of Compassion—A Roman Catholic Theology of Animals*,⁸² Jones looks closely at how animals have been addressed in the Roman Catholic Tradition over the past 2000 years. She concludes there is no current humane theology for animals, but she proposes the Church may be open to such an idea provided it contains elements from the tradition, is biblically based, and consistent with precedence.⁸³ Jones' idea aligns with Johnson's current theology and teaching whereby care for God's creation is seen in a new light and with a new emphasis. A component of this new emphasis is diet. It is challenging to separate animals from human diet when the two are so intrinsically related.

As did Tardiff, Jones also reviews the Catechism of the Catholic Church dealing with care for God's creation, namely Part Three (Life in Christ), § 2415-2418. Her summary and analysis are like Tardiff in that she concludes the lack of definitions makes it challenge to find clarity and consistent meaning. Their collective argument is that ambiguous terms like "needlessly" and "reasonable" can be interpreted differently depending on the reader and the context. In the final chapter of her book, Jones sets forth

⁸¹ Ibid, 222-223.

⁸² Deborah M. Jones. *The School of Compassion—A Roman Catholic Theology of Animals*, (Herefordshire, GB: Gracewing, 2009).

suggested amendments to three of these four paragraphs to make them clearer and up to date relative to themes of anthropocentric and human domination over other forms of creation, keeping in line with Jones' theology of kenotic charity towards the whole of creation.

These four paragraphs are under the heading of "Respect for the integrity of creation". . CCC § 2415 currently states, in part:

"The seventh commandment enjoins respect for the integrity of creation. Animals, like plants and inanimate beings, are by nature destined for the common good of past, present, and future humanity. Use of the mineral, vegetable, and animal resources of the universe cannot be divorced from respect for moral imperatives."⁸⁴

Jones adds language that addresses the tempering of economic development so as to be considerate of the ecosystems and she adds language clarifying human dominance as being a role of service, not tyranny.⁸⁵

In CCC § 2416, animals are addressed directly and explicitly as follows:

"Animals are God's creatures. He surrounds them with his providential care. By their mere existence they bless him and give him glory. Thus, men owe them kindness. We should recall the gentleness with which saints like St. Francis of Assisi or St. Philip Neri treated animals."⁸⁶

Jones does not recommend any changes to §2416. She does offer extensive edits to § 2417 to update it to be more in line with the current times relative to food, clothing, medicine, and leisure coupled with our current culture of profit and self-satisfaction. She clarifies that in using animals to meet human's legitimate basic needs, which cannot

⁸³ Ibid, 5.

⁸⁴ U.S. Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (New York, NY: Crown Publishing, 1995), 640.

⁸⁵ Jones, 276.

otherwise be met, they must do their utmost to secure the well-being of the animals to the highest possible degree and not give priority to the concerns of income and profit...⁸⁷

This seems to add a lot of value and clarity to caring for God's Creation.

Lastly, in CCC § 2418, there appears to be the most ambiguity that is found in the current text:

“It is contrary to human dignity to cause animals to suffer or die needlessly. It is likewise unworthy to spend money on them that should as a priority go the relief of human misery. One can love animals; one should not direct to them the affection due only to persons.”⁸⁸

Jones sets forth a re-write of this paragraph while retaining the importance of human suffering as a priority and appropriate love as to the needs of the species.⁸⁹ It seems the current text of the Catechism of the Catholic Church sends a bit of mixed message regarding care of animals and this, in turn, relates to diet. It also states that “God entrusted animals to the stewardship of those whom he created in his own image. Hence it is legitimate to use animals for food and clothing. They may be domesticated to help man in his work and leisure.”⁹⁰ To say it is legitimate to use animals for food and clothing assumes there are no other means to have food and clothing provided. With the technological advancements today's American culture experiences, there is no need to use animals for food or clothing other than convenience, vanity, and lack of knowledge and understanding.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 2416, 640.

⁸⁷ Jones, 277.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 640.

⁸⁹ Jones, 277.

⁹⁰ U.S. Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (New York, NY: Crown Publishing, 1995),

The argument presented here is that the legitimacy in using animals for food and clothing is far outweighed by the negative impacts these uses produce, not only for the animals themselves but also for those populations on the margins of society, and for the environment. The ideal of “making a lot money” as being more important than the ideal of “caring for one another and the earth” can be turned around. Adopting a vegan diet is an individual, incremental step towards that shift in our social structure and culture. Jones’ work aligns with and supports Johnson’s theology of expansive salvation focusing on extending God’s redemptive mercy to and blessing all of creation.

In an essay written for the Humane Society of the United States, a non-Catholic, but Christian view of diet and care for God’s creation is set forth by Matthew C. Halteman, a philosophy professor at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Halteman questions whether God’s creation is a resource to be used at human’s discretion. Halteman argues that using creation as a resource leads to an excessive consumer culture. He makes the point that humans are here to serve God’s will and not our own will. His statement that “we are creatures among creatures” aligns with the principle of integrity of creation set forth in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.⁹¹

Halteman emphasizes how integral and significant eating is and how it ties with who we are and our spiritual nature. He argues that choices for what we eat connect us to our answer to God’s call to care for creation. Choices of what our diet consists of should have the effect of renewal rather than degradation of God’s creation. He focuses

640.

⁹¹ Matthew C. Halteman, “Compassionate Eating as Care of Creation”, Washington, D.C.: The Humane Society of the United States, 2010.

on three challenges we need to face: 1) Honesty: face the facts, get out of denial and rationalization of food choices, 2) Conviction: this is the action component that follows honesty in that the choices and attempts we make to align with the facts we now have assimilated to live toward the vision of God’s call to care for creation daily, and lastly, 3) Imagination: Envisioning the Peaceable Kingdom called forth in Scripture and Tradition.⁹²

It does not seem that the culture of today adheres to or embraces that sentiment. Sometimes a crisis is what it takes to have people recognize how terribly changes are needed. The changes can start now with each one of us. Elizabeth Johnson summarized theological research as not simply reiterating received doctrinal formalisms, but rather probing and then interpreting them in order to deepen understanding.⁹³ Her formulas and methodology for caring for God’s Creation accomplish that purpose. Jurgen Moltmann, in the Epilogue for a book of essays in honor of Elizabeth A. Johnson, states that the planet can survive without us humans and did so for millions of years, but we can’t live without the earth.⁹⁴ Moltmann calls for humans to learn “cosmic humility rather than the “modern arrogance of world domination”.”⁹⁵

In transitioning awareness from antipathy to empathy as to how diet choices impact God’s Creation and furthering a supporting theology for the earth and all its

⁹² Ibid, p. 6 & 7.

⁹³ Heidi Schlumpf. Elizabeth Johnson—Questing for God. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016), 116.

⁹⁴ Julia Brumbaugh, and Natalia Imperatori-Lee., Editors. *Turning to the Heavens and the Earth, Theological Reflections on a Cosmological Conversion, Essays in Honor of Elizabeth A. Johnson.* (Collegeville, MN: Order of Saint Benedict, 2016), p. 257.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 257.

creatures, the final chapter will summarize and synthesize the key themes covered in the first four chapters.

Chapter 5 – Conclusion

This chapter will summarize and pull together the argument that a vegan diet aligns with and supports the Catholic Social Teaching principle of Care for God's Creation. It will also note the associated improvements and positive outcomes that accompany caring for God's creation through a vegan diet.

As mentioned in the first chapter, the three-legged stool that supports and explains a vegan diet is comprised of health, humane treatment and compassion for animals, and care for the environment. The information set forth in this paper has shown these three principles can also be used to support and frame a model for Caring for God's Creation. Caring for God's Creation includes the key principles of dignity of life, community and the common good, and the integrity of creation.

A strong link exists between a vegan diet and Caring for God's creation. There is no conclusion in this paper that everyone needs to adopt a vegan diet to abide by the principle of Caring for God's creation, but rather the evidence and information set forth in this paper provide the nexus between the two. It also provides a starting point for a journey towards better health for all of God's creation. Elizabeth Johnson reminds us to re-envision our faith. The smallest deeds are more impactful than the greatest intentions. It is important to keep the dialogue open and non-polarized. Moving towards a less anthropocentric attitude towards diet and food sources can be likened to tossing a pebble in a pond. There is a realization of the impacts food and diet choices make and the

choices, like the pebble, cause the ripples go to the area where the food was produced, what was involved producing the food and how these processes impact human beings, all creatures, and the environment.

In exploring current Catholic theology and teaching on the topic of Care for God's creation and the connection it may have to diet, the research showed that Catholic Social Teaching allows for and supports a vegan diet. Although the Tradition does not explicitly address food choices, diet is inexorably connected to all of God's creation. The connectivity between God's creation and food choices is seldom addressed as our current culture typically is not aware of what goes into a neat package of food at the grocery store and what ramifications it had, good and/or bad, on the environment and people. The theological argument of alignment of diet with living a virtuous life can be further supported by revisiting a working definition of theology and applying that definition to implementation. A similarity found in the many definitions for practical theology is looking at how the Christian religion can be lived as an intelligible way of life for an individual or a community. Theologian and author, Professor Terry A. Veling writes, "The work of practical theology is vocational work, in which our purpose for being in the world is related to the purposes of God."⁹⁶ Veling further states that practical theology is a response to the call of God in which we come to realize that our purpose for "being in the world" is to respond to the "purposes of God".⁹⁷ In short, it is possible to live one's theology in life. Life involves change. A saying heard often in a wellness workshop I

⁹⁶ Terry A. Veling, *Practical Theology, "On Earth as It Is in Heaven"*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 12.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 12.

attend is, “If nothing changes, nothing changes”. Incremental changes lead to mass changes. Changes focused on flexibility rather than resistance follow God’s plan and relationship with the world—today as built up over time since creation.

Catholic Social Teaching as reviewed in chapter two revealed that over time the documents of Catholic Social Teaching, although building on the preceding documents, evolved and changed to be current and applicable to the times in which they were written. The specific documents addressing Care For God’s Creation also have evolved and addressed current issues of our time. The theologians who most closely address Care for God’s creation address the critical issues we are facing as a planet. These all blend together and provide encouragement for improvements to our lifestyles that will help care for and sustain God’s creation. A foundational principle found in the writings that does not change is that of respect for and an understanding of the unity and integrity of God’s creation. One component of this relationship can be a vegan diet in that it lessens the negative impacts to the environment and society.

A vegan diet provides a solid framework and foundation upon which to base a life based on the Gospel inspiring and Scripture-based guidelines of health, dignity of life, compassion for creation and humane treatment of animals. Although the foundational documents tend not to have tactical suggestions for implementation, action is a necessary component of living a faith-based life. Knowing and serving God’s plan for one’s life includes understanding the milieu in which one lives. If one lives in 21st century America, there are established societal norms in which living takes place. The SAD diet is one of these items that is embedded into the system or structure of what constitutes

“normal life” in America. This includes the contemporary ways of consumerism and materialism. However, when society becomes aware of something that may be a structural sin or issue, there is a responsibility to address it and fix it. Diet sources is one of these “issues”.

This is echoed in the words of Elizabeth Johnson in Chapter three where she commented that it is time for theology to look away from the mirror and out the window to see that we are a part of a much bigger world. Pastorally, many churches now sponsor and support gardens that build community and provide healthy non-processed food for individuals at little to no cost. An additional idea for implementation is to have a plant-based community buffet after a Sunday Mass where the Liturgy for that day could be focused on the importance of diet choices. An example would be the 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time B,⁹⁸ where the messages of the Scripture are to be doers of the word, not only hearers. The homily can use these passages to support and confirm the praxis of a vegan diet as it supports the purposes of God.⁹⁹ A community buffet with recipes and beautiful food can be a nice culmination of this celebration.

Community outreach and education can mitigate the effects of ignorance that lead to exploitation and damage to God’s Creation. Without a sense of the inherent sacredness of the world—God’s beautiful Creation—humans struggle to see God in our own reality, let alone to respect reality, protect it, or to love it. Personal salvation is connected to social and systematic implications. When one can demonstrate God’s goodness in the world by nurturing a deep sense of worth and respect for every person and all of creation,

there is movement in the flow of God’s goodness through humanity and out to others and the world. Every choice made matters—including food choices. The action and practice of Jesus’ ways calls humanity to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God’s creation. We show respect for our Creator by stewardship of His creation. It is up to the individual and the Church community to take the teachings and live them.

One example of this is the Stella Maris Parish Community in Door County, Wisconsin. This church community adopted a “green purchase policy” to help care for the earth. The policy sets forth the intention that when buying goods and services, care will be taken to choose the most environmentally friendly and financially feasible option available. This policy was prompted by Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si*. By acting, the parish community is leading by example and helping to educate and inform community members what can be done to care for the environment and why it is important. Although it is not tied explicitly to diet choices, it is small steps like this that make ripple effects that start other steps and actions.

In 2009, the Diocese of Green Bay issued a Resource Packet that covered Stewardship of Creation materials for the Diocesan Churches and Schools. One of the sheets in the packet contains a listing of references on the Theology of Stewardship of Creation and it includes the 1991 and 2001 United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Statements being cited in this paper as supporting the link between a vegan diet and Care for God’s Creation. This local packet of materials is comprehensive and full of energetic

⁹⁸ McKenna, 138.

suggestions that align with Scripture and the other Foundational Documents.

Also pertinent to diet and food choices in Catholic education are the Rice Bowl Calendars and stories and recipes during the Lenten Season. The recipes are always meatless and mainly vegan. Church members are encouraged to make these meals, which are typically complete sources of protein and very economical with little to no processed foods. The ingredients are plant sourced and based which means less production and less waste in the ingredients. A great idea for an outreach at a parish during Lent is to offer the Rice Bowl recipes as an additional choice with Friday fish fry dinners. It provides excellent exposure to another way to meatless and healthy eating that is less expensive and less impactful to the environment. A local parish recently offered a meatless Rice Bowl dinner after an afternoon meeting. These small steps make a difference in perception and awareness of new ways of eating.

As mentioned in chapter two, the Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice (CAPP) Foundation formed by Saint John Paul II in 1993 is dedicated to improving social structures, as well as addressing pertinent key issues. The process they use reflects on Catholic Social Teaching first, then uses the reflection to evaluate the world, forming a prudential judgment, and then acting in the public square. The “see, judge, act” steps set forth are further affirmed in the 2019 Statement by CAPP, “Ethics for an Age of “New Things”¹⁰⁰, that contains guidelines for ways to work towards a sustainable, fully human market economy. The guidelines include calculating the cost of environmental damage

⁹⁹ Ibid, 138.

¹⁰⁰ <http://www.centesimusannus.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/NYC-consultation-short-summary-Final.pdf>

and reducing loss and waste and improving the quality and productivity on food production. This focus ties directly to moving towards more sustainable ways of producing food that incorporate less waste, i.e., a vegan diet. There is a connection between the food we eat and our spiritual and physical welfare.

Catholic Social Teaching is a working example showing that when a larger vision of truth presents itself, humanity may have to update its awareness without casting aside the earlier systems on which we based our beliefs. These earlier beliefs are the rich tradition of the Church's past and give the necessary foundational strength for its community and members to move forward as well as giving insights as to how we got here and why we believe what we believe. If something stops growing, it dies. This is true with Catholic Social Teaching—it is a tradition that is continually evolving.

There is a very complex and powerful economy associated with the dairy, egg, and meat industries. This is a sign of the times—follow the money and typically you will find the *why*. In today's food industry, science and business have taken over as the major explanations of meaning and purpose. Science is used to make more money. The integrated picture many times is not presented. The lack of attention to the Christ Mystery and Scripture can lead to negative ways of treating God's Creation.

Adopting a vegan diet or incorporating more plant-based foods and less meat in our diets is one way, on our path in this earthly pilgrimage, to help fulfill God's will for our lives by bringing creation back to where God created it to be. It seems the signs of the times are indications for a change. Improving on diet choices will help move us in the direction towards the Kingdom of Heaven, i.e., the eschatological end and fulfillment of

God's Creation on earth. Diet choice is one incremental step we can make in a lifestyle change that will contribute to the common good.

The second Vatican Council document *Gaudium et Spes*, in the subsection on the Common Good in Chapter II on the Human Community, states that “the social order requires constant improvement: it must be founded in truth, built on justice, and enlivened by love: it should grow in freedom towards a more humane equilibrium.”¹⁰¹ Implementing changes in dietary choices that are more environmentally friendly is an improvement that supports the common good.

There is a need to build upon and bridge differences rather than resorting to fighting what is wrong. Living in a peace with all fellow earthlings is an action that reaps many rewards for many areas of life: better environmental conditions, reduction in animal suffering, and improved health. The hope of the Gospel is for all of God's creation. Choosing to make a lifestyle change to incorporate more plant-based foods and fewer animal-based foods is an action everyone can take to better care for God's creation. This paper has set forth reliable evidence that supports the nexus between a vegan diet and care for God's creation. Human dignity is tied to dignity for all of God's creation. It is a tapestry that is linked inexorably. A vegan diet does respond to and support the purposes of God on this earth. A plan of action to accomplish this is the next step.

Once we know something, we cannot *unknow* it. When a larger vision of what is right and true presents itself, we may have to update our awareness. This can be done

¹⁰¹ Austin Flannery, O.P., General Editor. *The Documents of Vatican Council II*. (Northport, New York: Costello Publishing). 2007, p. 192 (GS 26).

without throwing away the earlier systems upon which beliefs are based. This continual expansion appears to be what God wants for his people and his Church—to grow and advance closer to God during the earthly journey. Living faith is becoming more important than knowing faith. There is an opportunity for us to incrementally transform the social structure of the Standard American Diet to be one of peace, health, and wellbeing for all of God’s Creatures and Creation.

Science and business are currently relied upon as major explainers of meaning. This leads to a lack of attention to the way society treats God’s Creation. Actions can speak louder than words and actions of adopting a diet more focused on plants offers collateral benefits rather than collateral damages. Being mindful of what is “behind the story” in food choices can heighten awareness and improve our interconnectivity with God’s Creation. This can be managed by thinking of statements that do not inadvertently denigrate the other people’s choices or make them think you are accusing them of something. Having alternative plant-based choices is also fun as most people enjoy trying and learning about new things.

Collateral benefits of a vegan diet also spill over to other Catholic Social Teaching principles, especially that of taking care of our neighbors, especially those in need and those that are vulnerable. It is a call to responsibility to be the best person we can be. The most direct impacts of a vegan diet supported through this study and analysis are those related to the health of the environment. A collateral “benefit” is the parallel outcome of more humane and less violent treatment of animals.

God is always present, even in the experience of eating and diet. It is possible to

update our awareness without casting aside Tradition and Faith. In fact, the Tradition, Scripture, Experience and Reason support a vegan diet. A vegan diet supports and builds upon Tradition, Scripture, Experience and Reason. God brought forth all of Creation and it is His loving self-expression. To love God means loving the world as well. Diet is an activity that is seldom addressed in these areas. Humans are all at different places in their respective earthly journey and there is a need for respect for others as to where they are at. Making incremental changes and inspired encouragement for a healthier way of living benefits the community and the environment. Reducing or eliminating meat from human diets will support enabling all of the world's people to have better diets if grazing land can be returned to diverse agricultural use.

All great movements typically are incremental in nature. Transformations of institutions, societies, cultures, and of individuals stem from both inner conversion and external conversion. The review of Catholic Social Teaching shows there is a consistent message of the importance of equitable sharing of the world's goods among all of God's creation. Pope Francis embodies the management platitude "Walk the Talk". Pope Francis is taking one step and one word at a time by traveling and talking to people all over the world. In an editorial in the National Catholic Reporter, Pope Francis is quoted as saying: "Many think that changes and reforms can take place in a short time. I believe that we always need time to lay the foundations for real, effective change."¹⁰²

Pope Francis concluded his encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si'*, with "A Christian Prayer in Union with Creation", and this part of the prayer provides a fitting

summary to this paper:

Triune Lord, wondrous community of infinite love,
Teach us to contemplate you in the beauty of the universe,
For all things speak of you.
Awaken our praise and thankfulness for every being that you have made.
Give us the grace to feel profoundly joined to everything that is.
God of love, show us our place in this world
as channels of your love for all creatures of this earth,
for not one of them is forgotten in your sight.
Amen.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Thomas C. Fox, "Francis is the exclamation point on Vatican II", *National Catholic Reporter*, October 25, 2013, Vol. 50 Issue. 28.

¹⁰³ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, *Encyclical Letter of the Holy Father Francis on Care for our Common Home* (Vatican City, 2015, www.usccb.org), p. 179-180.

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