

Appalachia and *Laudato Si'*: Developing the Connection between the Poor and the Environment

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In Laudato Si', Pope Francis links environmental degradation and the poor, writing that "the poor and the earth are crying out." Appalachia complicates the pope's claim, however, because it is an area that suffers from environmental degradation but also supports the Trump administration's dismantling of environmental regulations. Thus, Pope Francis' understanding of the poor in Laudato Si' needs development in three ways. First, he needs to explore how environmental degradation causes spiritual harm in addition to physical harm. Second, the pope needs to note that spiritual harm often causes the poor to cry out in ways that are sexist, racist, homophobic, and hostile toward the environment. Finally, the pope should note that the voices to be heeded in responding to environmental degradation are those voices marginalized within poor communities because they are most likely to address the spiritual harm and avoid scapegoating others.

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IN *Laudato Si'*, one of Pope Francis' major themes is the link between environmental degradation and the poor. This link is woven through the encyclical, finding its clearest expression when he writes that "the poor and the earth are crying out."¹ His understanding of this connection,

¹ Pope Francis, *On Care for Our Common Home (Laudato Si')*, May 24, 2015, §246, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_encyclica-laudato-si.html. Leonardo Boff's *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997) influenced Francis' understanding and use of this theme; see Alexandre Martins, "Laudato Si': Integral Ecology and Preferential Option for the Poor," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 46, no. 3 (2018): 410–24, especially 418–22.

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however, runs into complications when one considers Appalachia. It is an area of significant environmental degradation in the United States, sometimes referred to as a “sacrifice zone.” The people have suffered because of this environmental damage as they love the land and the land is bound up with their sense of self and self-worth. Even so, many of these same people were crucial to the election of Donald Trump, whose administration has removed and continues to remove many environmental regulations.² They cheered when President Trump said he was elected by “Pittsburgh not Paris” in anticipation of withdrawing from the Paris Accords.³ How are we to understand the connection between the environment and the poor when the poor love the land but oppose environmentalism?

In this paper, I argue that Appalachian people’s experience of environmental issues reveals the need to develop Pope Francis’ understanding of the connection between the poor and creation in *Laudato Si'*.⁴ Far from

² Brady Dennis, Michael Laris, and Juliet Eilperin, “Trump Administration to Freeze Fuel-Efficiency Requirements in Move Likely to Spur Legal Battle with States,” *The Washington Post*, August 2, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/2018/08/01/90c818ac-9125-11e8-8322-b5482bf5e0f5_story.html?utm_term=.ebea66e71527;

Juliet Eilperin, “Trump Administration Proposes Rule to Relax Carbon Limits on Power Plants,” *The Washington Post*, August 21, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/trump-administration-proposes-rule-to-relax-carbon-limits-on-power-plants/2018/08/21/b46b0a8a-a543-11e8-a656-943eefab5daf_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.d495a0229ae5; Darryl Fears, “Trump Administration Halted a Study of Mountain Coal Mining’s Health Effects,” *The Washington Post*, August 21, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2017/08/21/trump-administration-halted-a-study-of-mountaintop-coal-minings-health-effects/?utm_term=.4c5f4b1eb068.

³ Donald Gilliland, “Pittsburgh, not Paris’: Dueling Rallies Today Downtown and in Washington, DC,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, June 3, 2017, <http://www.post-gazette.com/news/politics-nation/2017/06/03/Trump-Pittsburgh-not-Paris-Paris-climate-accord-Mayor-Peduto/stories/201706030117>.

⁴ This essay focuses on the relationship between poverty and the environment. Pope Francis primarily develops this connection in *Laudato Si'*, so I focus on this encyclical for this essay. When the pope addresses the connection elsewhere—as in “Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the Celebration of the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation” in 2016 and “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants at the International Conference Marking the Third Anniversary of the Encyclical *Laudato Si'*” in 2018—he echoes what was said in the encyclical. There are other places that the pope develops his thoughts on poverty in general, but he does not connect these thoughts to environmental issues. See, for example, “Message of His Holiness Pope Francis on the First World Day of the Poor” in 2017, “Message of His Holiness Pope Francis on the Second World Day of the Poor” in 2018, “Message from His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the US Regional Meeting of Popular Movements,” in 2017, and in *Evangelii Gaudium*, §52–75 and §186–216.

undermining the pope's perspective, such an engagement strengthens it. After discussing how Pope Francis links the environment and the poor in *Laudato Si'*, I explore three ways the history and current experiences of Appalachians enhance the pope's argument. First, although the pope draws attention to the physical harm the poor suffer because of environmental degradation, his thought needs to be expanded to address how it also damages their sense of dignity. Thus, second, although the pope notes the earth and the poor cry out, he needs to account for the multivalent cry of the poor. Although their cry is rooted in threats to their dignity, it can be expressed in attempts to preserve the land, in despairing self-destruction, or in defensiveness that lashes out against others and environmentalism. Finally, because of the diversity of these cries, the pope needs to develop a way to listen to their cry. The damage done to their sense of dignity at the root of these cries needs to be heeded, but the lashing out at others needs to be opposed as much as the despair needs to be treated. Instead, the voices that respond to threats to human dignity by working to preserve people and land need to be prioritized, and these voices often come from those marginalized within marginalized communities.

One point of clarification: I do not mean Appalachia to stand in for the poor everywhere. Instead, focusing on Appalachia, an area that is both chronically poor and constantly under environmental duress, provides a perspective that sharpens the pope's insight that the poor and the environment are connected. Thus, I speak here not of the generic poor but from the perspective of one of the persistently poorest regions of the United States, the region where I was born, raised, and work. My hope is that such an approach would not only provide insights into other places and people harmed by environmental degradation but also encourage others to speak up and so make the church's responses to our environmental issues more effective.

***Laudato Si'* and the Poor**

The connection between the poor and the environment is a theme that runs through *Laudato Si'*. In the introduction, Pope Francis praises his namesake Saint Francis for his ministry "of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology" (§10). The pope then calls people to appreciate "those who tirelessly seek to resolve the tragic effects of environmental degradation on the lives of the world's poorest" (§13). Francis then closes out the introduction by indicating that, among the themes that will run throughout the document, he will emphasize "the intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet" (§16).

This theme is expressed in three different ways. First, the pope emphasizes the physical and material harm that environmental degradation causes the

poor. The poor suffer from premature deaths and sickness from contaminants in the air (§20) and in the water (§29–30). Their livelihood is frequently undermined as land for farming and rivers for fishing are polluted, forcing the poor to migrate (§25). Toward the end of chapter 1, Pope Francis succinctly sums up these effects by noting that “the deterioration of the environment and of society affects the most vulnerable people on the planet” and “the gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest” (§48).⁵

The second aspect of the theme connecting the poor and the environment is that the poor and the earth cry out together. The pope makes this claim three times. In the beginning of the encyclical, in chapter 1, the pope says that people must “hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” if they want to address justice in environmental debates (§49). In chapter 3, in the middle of the encyclical, the pope writes that “[w]hen we fail to acknowledge as a part of reality the worth of a poor person, a human embryo, a person with disabilities—to offer just a few examples—it becomes difficult to hear the cry of nature itself; everything is connected” (§117). Finally, in his concluding prayer, Francis states that “[t]he poor and the earth are crying out” (§246).⁶

Third and finally, Francis insists that those in power must hear the cry of the poor, especially those setting environmental policies. These individuals must pay attention to the “needs of the poor” (§52) and give them a “place at the table” (§183). Otherwise, the poor end up “paying the price” for additional regulations (§170). Further, those in power must work to “eliminate extreme poverty” and “promote the social development of their people” (§172). They must invest in rural infrastructure: “a better organization of local or national markets, systems of irrigation, and the development of techniques of sustainable agriculture” (§180).⁷

⁵ For a similar summary of how the environment causes physical harm to the poor, see Kevin Irwin, *A Commentary on Laudato Si': Examining the Background, Contributions, Implementation, and Future of Pope Francis's Encyclical* (New York: Paulist Press, 2016), 153, 157, 187–89.

⁶ For a similar summary connecting the cry of the poor to the cry of the earth, see Irwin, *A Commentary on Laudato Si'*, 124–25, 168; Reinhard Cardinal Marx, “‘Everything Is Connected’: On the Relevance of an Integral Understanding of Reality in *Laudato Si'*,” *Theological Studies* 77, no. 2 (2016): 295–307, at 297–99; Clement Campos, “*Laudato Si'*: An Indian Perspective,” *Theological Studies* 78, no. 1 (2017): 213–25, at 219.

⁷ For a similar summary of the powerful needing to heed the cry of the poor, see Irwin, *A Commentary on Laudato Si'*, 53–55, 162; Marx, “‘Everything Is Connected,’” 304–05; Campos, “*Laudato Si'*,” 221–22. In “Integral Ecology as a Liberationist Concept,” *Theological Studies* 77, no. 2 (2016): 353–76, Daniel Castillo also emphasizes that Pope Francis demands the powerful listen to the poor by arguing that such a perspective makes his approach one of liberation theology.

Through each of these three aspects, Pope Francis supports his theme that the poor and the environment are connected. That the poor suffer physically from environmental degradation, that they cry out along with the earth, and that those with power must heed their cry, these three themes capture what is witnessed and needed in rural and urban communities around the world. However, an examination of the Appalachian region and its people reveals that each aspect needs some development. First, environmental degradation not only affects the physical and material life of the poor, but also their dignity. Their outlook on the world, place in it, and sense of worth can be as damaged as their health and home. Thus, second, the cry of the poor is not a singular or simple cry for help. When the environment is damaged, the poor can become strong and resilient and speak out, but they can also turn in on themselves in despair or lash out at others in anger. The poor cry out in multiple voices, including some that are at odds with the cry of the earth. Finally, the call to heed the cry of the poor provides no direction on how to heed multiple voices or voices antagonistic to environmental concerns.

Damage to a Sense of Dignity

In *Where There Are Mountains: An Environmental History of the Southern Appalachians*, Donald Davis explains that most Appalachians lived off the land in the late nineteenth century.⁸ They used timber to build their houses and hunted in the woods for food. They planted crops on their farms and used nearby streams for drinking, fishing, and irrigation. In southwest Virginia and Tennessee, there was also a thriving freshwater mussel population that produced pearls. Appalachians would often gather these and send them to market. By the early twentieth century, this industry “had grown to a half-a-million dollar enterprise, and Tennessee was considered one of the nation’s six leading states in the marketing of quality pearls.”⁹ It was not an easy life, but people made a living, provided for themselves, and earned a little extra money with pearls.

All of this changed with the rise of the timber industry. Although Appalachia always had an abundance of woods, it mostly had been left alone because it was difficult getting the timber out of the area to urban environments. The building of railroads and dams, however, enabled the timber industry to move into Appalachia.¹⁰ Instead of being an economic boon for

⁸ Donald Davis, *Where There Are Mountains: An Environmental History of the Southern Appalachians* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2005).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 189.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 165.

the area, it was the beginning of an economic extraction by “outsiders” that left the land and people impoverished. The timber boom of the late nineteenth century was “financed almost exclusively by northern and foreign investors.”¹¹ The Canadian Alexander Arthur acquired 80,000 acres in Kentucky in the 1870s. The British James Bowron bought 150,000 acres in Tennessee, and his countryman Thomas Hughes acquired 375,000 acres scattered across the area.¹² Moreover, the timber was shipped to northern and European markets. By 1930, more than 60 percent of the land was owned by foreign or northern corporations.¹³ By 1981, the last year a comprehensive study was done, corporations from outside the region owned 50 percent of the land, 70 percent of the mineral rights, and paid 4 percent of the taxes.¹⁴ Estimates now indicate that although land ownership is less concentrated—now only a little over 30 percent of the land is owned by corporate entities—the taxes on their land are still significantly lower than those on individual owners.¹⁵

Outsiders were not only taking the land and trees and destroying pearls and other means of survival, they were also bringing disease. In New York, around 1904, the introduction of Japanese chestnut trees into a zoological park began the destruction of American chestnut trees.¹⁶ Within eight years, the chestnut trees in New York City were completely wiped out. In Appalachia at this time, American chestnut trees accounted for about one-fifth of the trees, with some areas being covered by one-third.¹⁷ When the blight reached the area in 1929, it killed 17 percent of the trees that year, and continued until every American chestnut tree in the area was wiped out by 1940.¹⁸ Facing this rapid decline of a valuable type of tree, the logging industry increased the speed of harvesting, trying to get at the American chestnuts before they were too damaged for use.¹⁹ When the land was cut clean or dead, the corporations made one last bit of profit by

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 167.

¹² *Ibid.*, 163–64.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 176.

¹⁴ The Appalachian Land Ownership Task Force, *Who Owns Appalachia? Landownership and Its Impact* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1983), chapters 2 and 3.

¹⁵ Elizabeth Payne, “Owning the Mountains: Appalachia’s History of Corporate Control,” *The Appalachian Voice*, February 18, 2016, <http://appvoices.org/2016/02/18/corporate-land-ownership-appalachia/>.

¹⁶ Davis, *Where There Are Mountains*, 193.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 192.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 193.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 196.

selling the unusable land to the federal government as part of its conservation effort.²⁰

This environmental damage could not help but harm Appalachians' material well-being. Some residents were bullied by corporations into selling their land. Others were humiliated as corporations employed legal maneuvers to force government foreclosures on those who were delinquent on their property taxes.²¹ In both cases, people lost their land and homes and so left the area.²² Those who stayed faced almost impossible odds to live on their land. Animal habitats were destroyed. The streams dried up or flooded the land, killing the fish, undermining farming, and wiping out the mussel population. The pearl industry was so thoroughly destroyed that hardly anyone knows it ever existed. Useable farmland decreased. From 1880 to 1910, the average farm size was cut in half, from 187 acres to 90 acres. By 1930, it was down to 76 acres.²³ This inability to make a living led to poverty and difficulty for people trying to care for home and family. More than this, though, the loss of livelihood was accompanied by loss in people's sense of self-worth.

In addition to taking land and property, those in charge of the timber industry also utilized Appalachian stereotypes to justify their actions.²⁴ As Jill Fraley notes in "Appalachian Stereotypes and Mountaintop Removal," stereotypes are usually "wrapped up in efforts to dominate and oppress—to take land and resources—through dehumanizing a group and eroding their dignity."²⁵ Such a use of stereotypes facilitated the taking of land and resources by claiming that the inhabitants did not deserve it. This strategy was so effective that both the exploitation and stereotypes persist today. Although Appalachia has and still produces much of the nation's energy resources—primarily timber, coal, and natural gas—the people are said to be "primitive, dirty, uneducated, lazy, prone to violence, and sexually deviant."²⁶ They suffer from "white resentment, gun worship, religious

²⁰ Ibid., 175.

²¹ Ibid., 176–77.

²² Ibid., 177. See also Richard Hasler, "The Tragedy of Privatization: Moving Mountains in Appalachia, A Southern African Critique," *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 11, no. 1/2 (2005): 95–103, at 99.

²³ Davis, *Where There Are Mountains*, 179.

²⁴ David Hsiung, *Two Worlds in the Tennessee Mountains: Exploring the Origins of Appalachian Stereotypes* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 20–54.

²⁵ Jill Fraley, "Appalachian Stereotypes and Mountaintop Removal," *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice* 19, no. 3 (2007): 365–370, at 367.

²⁶ Ibid., 366.

fundamentalism, racism.”²⁷ All of them chew tobacco, drink Budweiser, drive a pick-up truck, and hate President Obama.²⁸

Like all stereotypes, these Appalachian stereotypes cause immense harm to people. Children are looked down upon in school, and they respond to this harm by devaluing school and emphasizing family, where they feel valued.²⁹ The family typically copes with cultural bias, low employment rates, and environmental degradation in two ways. Some parents become more authoritarian in an attempt to help their children deal with the harsh conditions around them.³⁰ Other parents respond with a kind of passive resignation, overwhelmed by the forces that work against them.³¹

This loss of land that was the livelihood of people and the stereotypes that justified the loss negatively affected people’s sense of their dignity and worth. Some broke and despaired. They turned inward on themselves, often through drugs and alcohol, to avoid the bleakness around them, a response that can still be seen in the quadrupling of deaths of despair in the area over the last two decades.³² Others sought protection for themselves and their dignity by lashing out at others. They emphasized norms of gender, race, and sexual orientation to create cultural boundaries around themselves.³³

²⁷ Adam Kirk Edgerton, “What’s Wrong with Being from the South? Just Ask an Academic in the North,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 25, 2018, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/What-s-Wrong-With-Being-From/243510>.

²⁸ Ryan Hrobak, “Hating Rural Americans,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, June 25, 2014, <http://www.post-gazette.com/opinion/2014/06/25/Hating-rural-Americans/stories/201406250038>.

²⁹ Katie Hendrickson, “Student Resistance to Schooling: Disconnection with Education in Rural Appalachia,” *The High School Journal* 95, no. 4 (2012): 37–49, at 37.

³⁰ Rural and Appalachian Youth and Families Consortium, “Parenting Practices and Interventions among Marginalized Families in Appalachia: Building on Family Strengths,” *Family Relations* 45, no. 4 (1996): 387–96, at 390–92.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 392.

³² Michael Meit, Megan Heffernan, Erin Tanenbaum, and Topher Hoffman, “Appalachian Diseases of Despair,” *Appalachian Regional Commission*, August 2017, https://www.arc.gov/assets/research_reports/AppalachianDiseasesofDespairAugust2017.pdf. See also Lara Moody, Warren Bickel, and Emily Satterwhite, “Substance Use in Rural Central Appalachia: Current Status and Treatment Considerations,” *Journal of Rural Mental Health* 41, no. 2 (2017): 123–35; Jennifer Moreland, Janice Raup-Krieger, Michael Hecht, and Michelle Miller-Day, “The Conceptualization and Communication of Risk among Rural Appalachian Adolescents,” *Journal of Health Communication* 18, no. 6 (2013): 668–85.

³³ Robert Wuthnow, *The Left Behind: Decline and Rage in Rural America* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2018), 141–58; Shannon Elizabeth Bell and Yvonne Braun, “Coal, Identity, and the Gendering of Environmental Justice Activism in Central Appalachia,” *Gender and Society* 24, no. 6 (2010): 794–813; Mary Ballard, John Paul

They supported those in the political system who spoke about protecting them and their families, even if that meant disregarding political traditions and institutions.³⁴ Still others focused on caring for those they loved, working hard at their jobs to provide what was needed. Some of these began advocating for the environment as an extension of this familial care while others, mainly those who worked with the coal and the natural gas industry, opposed environmentalism because it threatened their job and so their ability to care for their loved ones.

Thus, “outsiders” exploited the environment in Appalachia, damaged the material well-being of people, and justified the process by depicting the local people negatively. The result was not just material poverty but a poverty of spirit, a challenge to the people’s dignity. Such harm fractured the people, moving some to greater love but moving others to despair, defensiveness, or scapegoating. Pope Francis’ understanding of the damage done to the poor by environmental degradation does not account for these effects upon people’s sense of worth and value. The pope notes how the environment can affect the poor’s health and loss of work and home. In *Laudato Si’*, he even alludes to how violations of “solidarity and civic friendship,” “drug use,” and consumerism (§142) can lead to environmental problems. However, his perspective does not capture how environmental issues can cause spiritual harm like it has in Appalachia.

Far from being at odds with Pope Francis’ view in *Laudato Si’*, the insight that environmental problems threaten people’s sense of dignity, as well as their physical well-being, supports two of the pope’s important claims. First, it substantiates an integral ecology where “everything is connected” by noting that respect for our dignity is wrapped up with respect for the environment, each affecting the other. Second, the awareness of the harm caused to individuals’ sense of worth by environmental degradation also enhanced the pope’s critique of the “technocratic paradigm” that “gains control,” is “completely open to manipulation,” seeks to “extract everything possible,” and does so by “ignoring or forgetting the reality in front of us” (§106). It helps clarify that, in its exploitation of nature, the technocratic paradigm

Jameson, and Denise Martz, “Sexual Identity and Risk Behaviors Among Adolescents in Rural Appalachia,” *Journal of Rural Mental Health* 41, no. 1 (2017): 17–29.

³⁴ Jojanneke van der Toorn, Matthew Feinberg, John Jost, Aaron Kay, Tom Tyler, Robb Willer, and Caroline Wilmuth, “A Sense of Powerlessness Fosters System Justification: Implications for the Legitimation of Authority, Hierarchy, and Government,” *Political Psychology* 36, no. 1 (2015): 93–110, at 95. See also Tom Tyler, E. Allan Lind, and Yuen Huo, “Cultural Values and Authority Relations,” *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law* 6, no. 4 (2000): 1,138–1,163.

can destroy people, physically yes, but also spiritually. It might give some economic goods but at the cost of the good of the person.

The Multivalent Cry of the Poor

By not addressing the damage done to the poor's sense of dignity by environmental degradation, the pope does not write of their multivalent cry. Loss of a sense for worth and value contorts people and so can contort their cries. Some respond with great love but others with despair, anger, or protectiveness.³⁵ The origin and history of the term "redneck" helps us to see this contortion that leads to a multiplicity of voices. The term is often assumed to come from the red-colored skin on the back of one's neck from working in the fields, and the term means culturally backward, ignorant, and racist. However, its original meaning was "a miner of a labor union."³⁶ Mine owners and managers often used the term as an epithet, a substitute for "communist" or "Bolshevik," a play both on the color red and unionization. They also tried to paint these "rednecks" as lazy, thuggish, and ignorant, common motifs used to oppress vulnerable people.³⁷

The miners resisted these stereotypes. Red bandanas were given to miners by the unions. (Although some contend that the red bandanas were given to the miners by the coal companies to wipe their faces in the mines because, being red, they would hide any blood.³⁸) The miners wore the red bandanas around their necks or arms to indicate their "working-class identity and solidarity."³⁹ The red, at times, also signified a racial union between black, white, and immigrant miners.⁴⁰ In fact, "the red bandana is one of the oldest symbols of the labor movement in both the United States and Europe, and such neckerchiefs have long served as a form of protection for railroad

³⁵ Although not speaking about environmentalism in Appalachia, Elizabeth Catte argues for the diversity of voices in Appalachia, particularly against portrayals like J. D. Vance's *Hillbilly Elegy* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2016), which tends to homogenize the region; also see Catte's *What You Are Getting Wrong about Appalachia* (Cleveland: Belt Publishing, 2018).

³⁶ Patrick Huber, "Red Necks and Red Bandanas: Appalachian Coal Miners and the Coloring of Union Identity, 1912–1936," *Western Folklore* 65, no. 1 (2006): 195–210, at 195.

³⁷ Fraley, "Appalachian Stereotypes and Mountain Top Removal," 366.

³⁸ Jessica Lilly and Roxy Todd, "Inside Appalachia's Labor History: Do You Know Where the Word 'Redneck' Comes From?" *Inside Appalachia*, March 9, 2018, <http://www.wvpublic.org/post/inside-appalachias-labor-history-do-you-know-where-word-redneck-comes>.

³⁹ Huber, "Red Necks and Red Bandanas," 197.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 195.

men, miners, roughnecks, cowboys, loggers, and other American workingmen.”⁴¹

At times, a redneck being a “union man” was particularly clear, as in the 1921 Battle of Blair Mountain in West Virginia, “the largest armed insurrection in American labor history.”⁴² More than 15,000 striking miners, around 4,000 of whom were African American, fought with 2,000 deputies, company guards, and state militia. It was a war of attrition as the former had the numbers, but the latter had the firepower. The striking miners wore the red bandanas to indicate their side, with the opposing side wearing white neckerchiefs.⁴³ Eventually, the federal government intervened to quell the uprising. They sided with the local government against the miners, being ordered to stop or kill the “rednecks” who were said to be communists and lazy workers.⁴⁴

With federal and state authorities on their side, coal companies more aggressively undermined unions and propagated the belief that working in coal meant opposition to unions. African American men were brought in to work in order to undermine unions, either by using them as replacement workers in a strike or hoping racial prejudice would hinder cooperative action.⁴⁵ Companies consistently advanced the idea that the unions cost jobs, especially as markets became more competitive. Environmental regulations were said to further cause job loss, and the party supporting them was also the one advocating for unions. With declining jobs and the poisoning of thought about unions, the GOP rose to prominence in coal-mining areas in the early 2000s. Even though technology and, more recently, the rise of the natural gas industry through fracking are responsible for the loss of coal jobs, unions and governmental regulations were said to be the problem.⁴⁶ The corporations that controlled so much of employment had effectively shifted the blame away from themselves and, in doing so, emptied the term “redneck” from its union roots and perpetuated its meaning as ignorant, racist, and backward.

⁴¹ Ibid., 203.

⁴² Ibid., 203.

⁴³ Ibid., 203–04.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 200.

⁴⁵ W. Fitzhugh Brundage, “Racial Violence, Lynchings, and Modernization in the Mountain South,” in *Appalachians and Race: The Mountain South from Slavery to Segregation*, ed. John Inscoe (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2001), 313.

⁴⁶ Philip G. Lewin, “‘Coal Is Not Just a Job, It’s a Way of Life’: The Cultural Politics of Coal Production in Central Appalachia,” *Social Problems* 66, no. 1 (2019): 51–68; Gabe Schwartzman, “How Central Appalachia Went Right,” *The Daily Yonder*, January 13, 2015, <http://www.dailyyonder.com/how-coalfields-went-gop/2015/01/13/7668/>.

This story of “rednecks” reveals different Appalachian voices. There is the cry of solidarity found in miner unions who wore red bandanas and stood against poor working conditions. It was a solidarity that cut across racial lines and included recent immigrants. It is a cry that can still be heard in Appalachia today by people who seek protection of land and communities, by women and minorities, voices that I will explore more in the next section. However, the story also reveals different responses. Some white men became defensive. Work meant money, and money meant one could take care of family and neighbors, people that they loved. Without jobs, white men felt the Appalachian stereotype of being poor, ignorant, good-for-nothings.⁴⁷ Although there were jobs in the area other than mining, they were either lower-paying jobs or service jobs associated with women.⁴⁸ Without jobs or jobs that were considered demeaning, these white men were not providing for their wives and children, and the threat to their sense of dignity became their subjective reality.⁴⁹ Thus, some sought to protect themselves with a defensiveness about their identity.⁵⁰

Others spoke out against environmentalists, whom they perceived as a threat to their way of life and so their self-worth. As Marshall Jolly and Clint Jones noted, many Appalachians expressed the belief that environmentalists cared more for “plants than people.”⁵¹ In “How Green Is My Valley,” Robert Emmet Jones, J. Mark Fly, and H. Ken Cordell noted that Appalachians tended to associate environmentalists with educated urban-dwelling liberals.⁵² It is a description that likens these people to those in the past who took resources such as timber and coal, threatened the homes and livelihood of Appalachians, and dismissed the populace with demeaning stereotypes.⁵³ In “Evangelical Christians and the Environment,” Dwight Billings and Will Samson note that evangelicals in Appalachia associated “environmentalist”

⁴⁷ Fraley, “Appalachian Stereotypes and Mountain Top Removal,” 366.

⁴⁸ Linda Lobao, Minyu Zhou, Mark Patridge, and Michael Betz, “Poverty, Place, and Coal Employment across Appalachia and the United States in a New Economic Era,” *Rural Sociology* 81, no. 3 (2016): 343–86, at 347.

⁴⁹ Huber, “Red Necks and Red Bandanas,” 205.

⁵⁰ Shannon Beel and Yvonne Braun, “Coal, Identity, and the Gendering of Environmental Justice Activism in Central Appalachia,” *Gender & Society* 24, no. 6 (2010): 794–813, at 798–800.

⁵¹ Marshall Jolly and Clint Jones, “Re-Conceiving the Concept of Stewardship: Coal Production and the Importance of a New Christian Context for Appalachia,” *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 21, no. 1 (2015): 33–48, at 42.

⁵² Robert Emmet Jones, J. Mark Fly, and H. Ken Cordell, “How Green Is My Valley? Tracking Rural and Urban Environmentalism in the Southern Appalachian Ecoregion,” *Rural Sociology* 64, no. 3 (1999): 482–99, at 482.

⁵³ Fraley, “Appalachian Stereotypes and Mountain Top Removal,” 366.

with terms such as “Hollywood whackos.”⁵⁴ It is a phrase that expresses the perceived “craziness” of so many environmentalists’ policies that fail to attend to the real-world impact on the work, families, and people of Appalachia. Thus, the pope’s call in *Laudato Si’* for coal to be replaced “without delay” (§165) could not help but seem a threat to many in Appalachia, just as President Trump’s promise to bring back coal seemed a defense against such threats.

Finally, the end of the “redneck” story reveals a portion of people who cry out against anyone and anything that threatened their work.⁵⁵ All the mechanisms used by the corporations to deflect blame from themselves were picked up by many whose dignity and livelihood were threatened by the loss of coal-mining jobs. Unions and environmental regulations were opposed. Women entering the workforce were opposed. Minority groups entering the workforce were opposed. It was an opposition that contributed to the outward migration of African Americans at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁵⁶ By 1970, there were more women in mining than African Americans.⁵⁷ Despite recent rises, African Americans are less than 10 percent of the population throughout most of Appalachia.⁵⁸ The volatility of the labor market in mining, while primarily due to both technological displacement and foreign markets, only raises the volume of this cry against any perceived threat to employment.

This realization that the poor cry out in multiple ways, including ways that oppose the environment and other people, does not undermine but can strengthen the pope’s claim that the cry of the earth is linked to that of the poor. The poor and the earth share a history of neglect and damage that generates multiple, interrelated problems. The pope is clear that, on the environmental side, there are problems with pollution, climate change, clean water, biodiversity, and global inequality. Likewise, the solution requires, as noted in chapter 5 of *Laudato Si’*, the work of international, national, and local communities, decision-making bodies, politics and economics, religion and

⁵⁴ Dwight Billings and Will Samson, “Evangelical Christians and the Environment: ‘Christians for the Mountains’ and the Appalachian Movement against Mountaintop Removal,” *Worldviews* 16, no. 1 (2012): 1–29, at 20.

⁵⁵ See Wuthnow, *The Left Behind*, 95–115.

⁵⁶ William Turner, “The Demography of Black Appalachia: Past and Present,” in *Black in Appalachia*, eds. William Turner and Edward Cabbell (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1985), 237–61, at 239.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 249.

⁵⁸ Kelvin Pollard and Linda Jacobsen, “The Appalachian Region in 2010: A Census Data Overview,” *Appalachian Regional Commission*, 15, <https://assets.prb.org/pdf12/appalachia-census-chartbook-2011.pdf>.

science, *and*, as noted in chapter 6, new lifestyles, ecological conversion, and civic and religious participation. The complexity of threat to the environment makes more sense if, being linked to the poor, poverty itself is just as complex. Threats to human dignity, work, and family can generate solidarity and compassion, defensiveness to stave off a diminishing sense of worth, and adoption of prejudices that legitimize lashing out at others. Solutions need to address the initial degradation of the people and land but also an eroded sense of dignity, employment, and bias.

The multivalence of the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth also supports the pope's warning in *Laudato Si'* against technological solutions that suppress "different cultural paradigm[s]" and "make us all the same" (§108). The technocratic paradigm reduces problems to "a view of profit" and, in doing so, believe they "will solve all environmental problems" (§109). Such naive approaches fly in the face of the complex cry of the poor and the earth, and so, although technology might have a role, it cannot be assumed to be the whole solution. The poor and the earth need help, and the help goes beyond simple or singular technical fixes.

Heeding the Poor

The multivalent cry of the poor complicates the pope's advice to heed their cry. The poor cry out for help and respect but do so in different ways, some of which threaten people and the environment. Despite the complexity, the poor need to be heard. Without assuming that the poor make contributions to addressing environmental issues, policy-makers tend to continue exploiting the environment and the poor all the while insisting that they are acting for the good of people and the community. It is a phenomenon all too familiar for Appalachians.

In "Integral Ecology: Francis's Spiritual and Moral Vision of Interconnectedness," Vincent Miller captures how easily this is done, even by those not wishing to do so. Miller describes how, like so many others who care about the environment, he is embedded in a system that hides environmental degradation.

[The modern world] constructs a system in which objectification and exploitation of nature is taken for granted. The switch on my wall trains me in an entire view of the world and my role in it. I write in Southwest Ohio, where much of the electricity is provided by coal mined by the methods of mountaintop removal in the Appalachian Mountains. Every time I enter a room and turn on the lights, I'm acting within a system that presumes that our desire for light after the sun goes down justifies the destruction of the complex ecological systems of the Appalachian

Mountains.... Mountaintops are destroyed, but I'm seldom confronted with my connection to that. I see only the light switch.⁵⁹

His point about how easy it is to exploit the environment is even more pronounced when one realizes that 50 percent of US energy came from coal through the early 2000s. Although it dropped to 30 percent by 2016, this was partly due to the rise of cheap natural gas, another resource extracted from Appalachia.⁶⁰ My point, which I see as an extension of Miller's, is not just the invisible exploitation of the environmental resources of Appalachia but also how readily the voices of the people who work in these industries and feel the effects of such exploitation go unheeded. The lights and exploitation still go on, even for those who want to listen to the cry of the earth.

An explicit example of how people act in the name of benevolence while exploiting the poor and the environment comes from the Tennessee state government's project to put prisoners to work in mines in the late nineteenth century. The politicians contended that this would be a beneficial arrangement for multiple parties. Companies could lease prisoners from the state, and this would help cover the cost of the prisons and lessen the burden on law-abiding citizens.⁶¹ This work would also help the prisoners pay back their debt to society because they would help reduce the cost of fuel.⁶² Instead of having to pay typical workers \$2 an hour, they had to pay the prisoners only 80 cents an hour.⁶³ Finally, it would be good for the prisoners. Companies would obviously take care of them because they needed the workers, doctors would be employed to certify their health, and the experience would give the prisoners work experience they could use when they finished serving their time.⁶⁴

Although the price of coal came down, the cost to prisoners went up. Most prisoners were black men, picked up on charges such as vagrancy and

⁵⁹ Vincent Miller, "Integral Ecology: Francis's Spiritual and Moral Vision of Interconnectedness," in *The Theological and Ecological Vision of Laudato Si': Everything Is Connected*, ed. Vincent Miller (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 11–28, at 24.

⁶⁰ John Muyskens, Dan Keating, and Samuel Granados, "Mapping How the United States Generates its Electricity," *The Washington Post*, March 28, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/national/power-plants/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.d527058be88b.

⁶¹ Ronald Lewis, "African American Convicts in the Coal Mines of Southern Appalachia," in *Appalachians and Race: The Mountain South from Slavery to Segregation*, ed. John Inscoe (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2001), 264–65.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 267.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 276.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 264–65, 276.

loitering.⁶⁵ Police officers often drummed up these minor offenses as a way to enforce racial hierarchies.⁶⁶ Moreover, these officers were encouraged to do so by local politicians who owned prisons and mines and made more money with more prisoners to lease out.⁶⁷ The result was that African American men made up almost 90 percent of people in prison.⁶⁸ A ready supply of cheap labor meant companies did not bother caring about the prisoners, so those who worked in the mines had death rates higher than other prisoners and miners.⁶⁹ The doctors were hired by the mining companies and so served the companies' aims instead of the health of the people.⁷⁰ Even if prisoners got out of prison by avoiding extensions because of minor infractions, even if they were not too physically disabled from working in the mines that they could go work for mining companies, and even if there were still jobs not filled by the prison-leasing system, these African Americans would face a difficult working environment both from their race and from their association with the prison-leasing system that had undercut jobs and wages in the area.⁷¹ Needless to say, most just left the area.

This experience of being overpowered by policy-makers and being stripped of one's agency by forces that pretend they are serving the common good is present today with natural gas. Dominion Energy heads a coalition of companies building natural gas pipelines through Virginia and West Virginia. They were bringing jobs and money to the area all while reducing the cost of fuel. The project was approved by government officials, had erosion, soil, and sediment permits from the state, and entailed compensation for people whose land was acquired through the government's use of eminent domain. One family that turned down the compensation and refused to recognize the seizure of their land was the family of Theresa "Red" Terry. The land had been in her family since colonial times and consisted of 1,500 acres near the Blue Ridge Parkway. With the permits and permission in order, the company started cutting down trees on her property in the spring of 2018. After losing a lawsuit to stop the project, Red Terry and her family built two tree perches, one for her and one for her daughter, along the cutting route and began living in them. Terry was there for about three weeks before the workers reached her tree and stopped. When it became apparent that she was not going to get down from her perch, the company started legal

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 271.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 260.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 261.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 272.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 274.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 265.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 267.

proceedings. Eventually, their pressure resulted in a formal charge of trespassing (as she sat in a tree on her own land) and obstruction of justice. The police put tape around the base of the tree that prevented anyone from approaching it, in particular anyone who would bring Terry food and other basic necessities. The company insisted that this slow starvation was perfectly legal because they had all the permits. Moreover, it was costing consumers millions of dollars because the money was clearly more of a good than food was to Terry. When she still did not come down, the court threatened daily fines, fines that would have eventually bankrupted the family. A day later, she and her daughter came down. The court fined the family \$2,000 for the trouble and ordered the money to be given to the pipeline builders.⁷²

This reality that policy-makers exploit the poor and vulnerable even when publicly saying they are acting benevolently and legally has powerful resonance in Appalachia. It comes from stories like Terry's and the prison-leasing system as well as from the timber industry that felled the forests of Appalachia, destroying people's homes. However, it also comes from the coal industry that sacrificed the land and lives of miners for cheap coal for the rest of the country, making Appalachia a "sacrifice zone."⁷³ It comes from corporations working with local and federal governments that crushed cooperative actions among miners for better working conditions. It emerges today when corporations and state governments support fracking that cuts across people's property, periodically explodes, and poisons local water.⁷⁴

⁷² Gregory Schneider, "Perched on a Platform High in a Tree, A 61-Year-Old Woman Fights a Gas Pipeline," *The Washington Post*, April 21, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/virginia-politics/perched-on-a-platform-high-in-a-tree-a-61-year-old-woman-fights-a-gas-pipeline/2018/04/21/3b8284b4-435e-11e8-bba2-0976a82b05a2_story.html?utm_term=.17ecee5beef4; Gregory Schneider, "Women Sitting in Trees to Protest Pipeline Come Down after Judge Threatens Fines," *The Washington Post*, May 5, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/virginia-politics/federal-judge-rules-against-tree-sitters-protesting-gas-pipeline/2018/05/05/00ob14b8-5016-11e8-af46-b1d6dc09bfe_story.html?utm_term=.d02d59f1bd63.

⁷³ See Rebecca Scott, *Removing Mountains: Extracting Nature and Identity in the Appalachia Coalfields* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 31–64.

⁷⁴ See Eliza Griswold, *Amity and Prosperity: One Family and the Fracturing of America* (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 2018); Anya Litvak and Karen Kane, "Officials: W. Va. Explosion Was Along Newly Installed Natural Gas Line," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, June 7, 2018, <http://www.post-gazette.com/local/region/2018/06/07/Pipeline-explosion-moundsville-west-virginia/stories/201806070129>; Tony Raap, "W. Va. Natural Gas Line Explodes Near Ohio Border," *Tribune Review*, June 26, 2015, <http://triblive.com/news/alleggheny/7642785-74/gas-jackson-natural>; Susan Phillips, "PA Pipeline Explosion: Evidence of Corrosion Found," *State Impact Pennsylvania*, May 4, 2016, <https://stateimpact.npr.org/pennsylvania/2016/05/04/pa-pipeline-explosion-evidence-of-corrosion-found/>.

It also happens when corporations sell defective seeds to black farmers in Appalachia.⁷⁵ These examples and many more throughout Appalachian history make the whole area more than wary of those who speak about the common good or the environment because too often these are justifications for exploiting the area and the people—even if it is at times unconsciously through the flick of a light switch.

To counteract these forces, Pope Francis notes that the cry of the poor needs to be heard. However, the multivalent cry of the poor makes this difficult. Even though their cry is rooted in a lack of respect for their dignity, arising from environmental degradation, it gets expressed in various ways, including opposition to policies that would help people and the environment. In her “The Option for the Poor in *Laudato Si'*: Connecting Care of Creation with Care for the Poor,” M. T. Dávila notes, after praising Pope Francis for connecting environmental issues and poverty, that his understanding of the poor needs to be expanded, at least by addressing how it intersects with other issues such as immigration and race.⁷⁶ Following her advice to attend to intersectionality effectively helps to heed the cry of the poor. Often the defensiveness and opposition that is voiced by some in Appalachia comes from those who have some stake in the status quo, like a job with the coal or natural gas industry. Thus, their cries are conflicted, rooted in threats to their dignity and care for family that have come from environmental degradation but also voiced in opposition toward environmentalism and other people. However, those people who are part of Appalachia but do not have a stake in the status quo—often women, minorities, and those unaligned with the coal industry—are better able to speak both to affirming human dignity and possible ways forward. These people on the margins of a marginalized population reveal what might help and, thus, how to heed the cry of the poor.

Appalachian women are often pushed to the margins of Appalachian society, so many of them become ones who cry out for environmental justice in Appalachia. In “Coal, Identity, and the Gendering of Environmental Justice Activism in Central Appalachia,” Shannon Beel and Yvonne Braun discussed how women assumed leadership roles in environmental justice movements in the Appalachian region.⁷⁷ Although not being employed by the coal industry

⁷⁵ Tom Charlier, “Lawsuit: Black Farmers Given ‘Fake’ Seeds,” *USA Today*, July 19, 2018.

⁷⁶ María Teresa Dávila, “The Option for the Poor in *Laudato Si'*: Connecting Care of Creation with Care for the Poor,” in *The Theological and Ecological Vision of Laudato Si': Everything Is Connected*, ed. Vincent Miller (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 145–59, at 154.

⁷⁷ Beel and Braun, “Coal, Identity, and the Gendering of Environmental Justice Activism in Central Appalachia,” 794–95.

often left them more economically vulnerable, being outside of this business left them free to speak out against its harms to the environment.⁷⁸ They built on their identity as mothers who are concerned about individuals and the home and transformed it into an activism that expressed familial concern for other people, families, and homes.⁷⁹ In other words, they assumed a justice approach that expanded from concerns for family and kin out to the environment.⁸⁰ As Judy Bonds, one of the activists Beel and Braun interviewed, says, “Everyone’s child has to have clean air, and everyone’s child has to have clean water, and I want my great-great grandchildren to be able to live on this earth. Why shouldn’t they? Why *shouldn’t* they be able to live on this earth? It’s *my duty* to protect it for them. And that’s what I’m doing.”⁸¹

Some Christian communities are not directly aligned with the industry and politics of the region and so provide another voice for environmental concerns. In “Faith-Based Environmental Initiatives in Appalachia,” David Feldman and Lyndsay Moseley noted that some Christian communities were effective at moving people to engage environmental concerns by emphasizing personal commitments to God and Christ that included connections to environmental concerns.⁸² These churches spoke about how “the cross and resurrection ... empowers us to be loving servants of creation” and so the need for people to “come to understand and appreciate that the Earth is the Lord’s and we are called to be stewards of creation.”⁸³ It is an approach similar to Pope Francis’ call in *Laudato Si’* for an “ecological conversion” that “entails a loving awareness that we are not disconnected from the rest of creation” and so “can inspire us to a greater creativity and enthusiasm in resolving the world’s problems” (§220).

As an associate professor at Canisius College who is not affiliated with coal or natural gas production and as a person with family rooted in northern Appalachia, Nancy Rourke provides another perspective. In her “The Consequences of Fossil Fuel Addiction in Schoharie County,” Rourke tells the story of how her grandparents and their friends fought against industrial farming and then against gas lines to preserve their family farms, opposing the “economic benefits” the companies and local governments promised and

⁷⁸ Ibid., 807–08.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 795–96.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 795.

⁸¹ Ibid., 804.

⁸² David Lewis Feldman and Lyndsay Moseley, “Faith-Based Environmental Initiatives in Appalachia: Connecting Faith, Environmental Concern and Reform,” *Worldviews* 7, no. 3 (2003): 227–52, at 246.

⁸³ Ibid., 234.

pushed.⁸⁴ Their concern for family led them to challenge their community's welcome acceptance of Constitutional Pipeline Company's promises of prosperity if they were allowed to lay natural gas piping through the community. While not always successful, they labored to protect family, land, and community.

Bill Turner provides an important voice for addressing environmental issues in Appalachia as he worked as an academic at Berea College in Kentucky, is one of the preeminent scholars on African Americans in Appalachia, and is an African American who was raised in Harlan County, Kentucky, by a father and grandfathers who were coal miners. In his "People of Color in the Green Future of Central Appalachia," he argues that not only have African Americans been neglected in environmental movements, but their focus has been on their own self-preservation in the face of racism and their livelihood in the face of unemployment and low wages.⁸⁵ These cultural and industrial forces have "eroded and destroyed communities."⁸⁶ Turner uses the term "Affrilachians" for people of color in Appalachia, and writes that to survive, they should focus on values such as "social networking, community participation, cooperation, and mutual aid."⁸⁷ To draw in Affrilachians, environmental work needs to draw on these values by developing people, drawing on local culture, being inclusive, and utilizing local resources.⁸⁸

The Catholic Committee of Appalachia provides a final voice. The committee produced and the bishops promulgated *This Land Is Home to Me* in 1975 and *At Home in the Web of Life* in 1995.⁸⁹ Both documents were the products of numerous listening sessions that provided the foundation of the social analysis and theological reflection. In 2015, the committee issued the people's pastoral *The Telling Takes Us Home*, which gave explicit voice to people from the area.⁹⁰ One of the important themes that emerges

⁸⁴ Nancy Rourke, "The Consequences of Fossil Fuel Addiction in Schoharie County," *The Journal of Moral Theology* 6, no. 1 (2017): 125–43.

⁸⁵ William Turner, "People of Color in the Green Future of Central Appalachia," Berea College, 2010, <http://www.appalachiantransition.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Bill-Turner-Essay-FINAL.pdf>.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Catholic Bishops of Appalachia, *This Land Is Home to Me* (1975) & *At Home in the Web of Life* (1995), combined edition 2007, <https://ccappal.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/CCAbok040307-2.pdf>.

⁹⁰ Catholic Committee of Appalachia, *The Telling Takes Us Home: Taking Our Place in the Stories that Shape Us*, 2015, https://ccappal.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/PeoplesPastoral_final_forweb.pdf.

through these documents is an attentiveness to people, their communities, and their agency. In *This Land Is Home to Me*, after describing the diverse people of the area, the authors criticize the consolidation of power in the hands of the few and call for a fairer distribution of property and personal responsibility to counter these forces.⁹¹ This emphasis on personal agency emerges again in the third section, “Facing our Future,” where the authors state that the “[p]eople themselves must shape their own destiny.”⁹² In *At Home in the Web of Life*, the authors use Catholic social teaching to speak of principles that should guide action in Appalachia. They first discuss “Human Dignity” followed by the principle of “Community” whose “deepest place” and “model” is the family.⁹³ Solidarity was not mentioned, but the section on “Subsidiarity” used the word “undermine” five times to warn of the dangers large institutions and corporations often pose to local communities.⁹⁴ The bishops also noted the principle of “Ownership,” saying that it was the best way to care for “oneself and family,” “the community,” and the land because “the people and the land go together, by the very design of God.”⁹⁵ In *The Telling Takes Us Home*, dignity emerges as an important theme. Miners emphasize both the dignity of work and the dignity of creation, and gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people speak of the need to strengthen and protect their dignity and rights.⁹⁶ The document reemphasizes the point made in *The Land Is Home to Me* that the pursuit of “profit over people” threatens “the dignity of the earth and of its people.”⁹⁷ Instead, the document calls for respecting human dignity, a respect that should be seen in equality between women and men and workers who have a living wage, health care, and the ability to organize.⁹⁸

Through the voices of those in the region who are not invested in preserving the status quo—women, academics, Affrilachians, and Christian churches not aligned with the region’s political or industrial powers—one hears an emphasis on human dignity and agency and on family and local communities. It is a view that is cautious about outsiders coming in to address problems. These values speak to a kind of subsidiarity, drawing on the needs

⁹¹ Catholic Bishops of Appalachia, *This Land Is Home to Me & At Home in the Web of Life*, 28.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 32.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 73–74.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 75–76.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 76–77.

⁹⁶ Catholic Committee of Appalachia, *The Telling Takes Us Home*, 14–16, 23–25.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 30, 55.

and resources of people in the community, that can stand against a culture and its institutions that oscillate between disregard and exploitation.

At first glance, these voices from the margins of a marginalized area appear in tension with *Laudato Si'*. In the encyclical, Pope Francis mentions subsidiarity in passing only twice (§157 and §196). Instead, he speaks mostly of solidarity: universal solidarity (§14), violations of solidarity harming the environment (§142), summoning people to solidarity (§158), attending to intergenerational solidarity (§159, §162), the need for solidarity with the vulnerable (§227), and a global solidarity rooted in the Trinity (§241). When the pope speaks of private property, he carefully circumscribes it in terms of the common good (§93). Although the pope says that it is important to have a home (§152) and property (§94), he also relativizes these claims by appeals to “the universal destination of goods” and the “social mortgage” on all property.

Far from a contrast, however, the marginalized Appalachian voices and the pope’s view can be seen as complementary and, by doing so, the pope’s perspective can be developed. In advocating solidarity and the common good, Pope Francis seems to be speaking to the powerful, the policy-makers, ones who have property and a public voice. He calls on them to limit their ownership for the sake of others, subordinating their private property to the common good, and cede their power in the public sphere to the poor and vulnerable. Although these principles are needed for those with power, they can also be used as justification to exploit the poor. Red Terry’s property is taken by the state and corporations through appeals to the needs of the society, a distorted appeal to the “social mortgage” of property. The exploitation of prisoners is justified by a distorted claim to the common good because such actions will pay off their debt to society, give them job skills, and reduce the financial burdens of the rest of society. Miller’s example of the light switch serves to show how readily the poor are overlooked by the demands of the rest of the country, even by those not wanting to do so. Without some kind of check, the principles the pope is advocating for in *Laudato Si'* will become tools for further exploitation, causing the poor to be the ones “paying the price” (§170) for environmental reforms. In advocating for subsidiarity and agency for the poor, as those on the margins of Appalachia do, the pope can provide such a check. The rich and powerful will be exercising the principles of solidarity and the common good if they are ensuring the right to property of the poor and honoring a subsidiarity that protects the poor and marginalized from social sin and creates space for them to exercise their agency and voice. Far from being principles in opposition, they can function in a complementary relationship that strengthens both.

Thus, attending to the intersectionality of poverty enables the pope to further his claim of integral ecology. Heeding those voices of all the poor whose dignity is threatened and especially those voices within the poor who are further marginalized by being outside of the status quo, what the poor cry out for will be better heard and more likely to contribute to solutions. These people can advance ideas, not just technical or scientific ones but ones that attend to the community, the family, and the spirit. It is these voices of the marginalized poor that can not only address the threat to human dignity that is the root of the multivalent voices of Appalachia but also provide the check on the powerful. If Appalachian mothers and Affrilachians are heeded, solidarity and the common good will not be used to hide exploitation but to play their proper role in the use of power and property. Then, rich and poor, humanity and creation, and people and their community will all be connected.

Conclusion

Laudato Si' is a needed and important appeal to care for the environment. Moreover, it links this work to care of the poor and to the gospels. I am hoping to build upon the pope's ideas, especially his understanding of the poor, by using the history and experiences of the people of Appalachia. Doing so enables three developments in the understanding of the connection between the poor and the environment that we should take into future discourse.

First, we need to expand the understanding of how environmental degradation harms the poor. In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis notes how it damages their physical well-being and material good. The experiences of Appalachia help us to see that environmental degradation also damages and threatens people's sense of worth and dignity. Land is stripped of resources, and its destruction is justified through stereotypes. As the land is harmed, so are the people. In response, some become defensive, seeking to protect themselves. They retreat to their family and work. Some despair and turn to drugs or alcohol. Some lash out at those they perceive as a threat to their work and family. Still others expand their concerns to care not just for their own family but also other families in their community. Each, though, speaks the precarious sense of dignity that emerges from the environmental exploitation of the area.

Second, we need to have a more complex understanding of the cry of the poor. The cry is one for help, to address the wounds that have arisen over time from exploitation of land and their labor. It is not, however, simple or singular. Threats to dignity can give rise to cries of compassion and solidarity or to protect self and family, but they can also give rise to cries against

environmentalism or anyone thought to be a threat. While having similar origins, these varied cries speak to multiple issues of work, family life, fear, and prejudice. Moreover, it raises the question of how we heed the multivalent cry of the poor rooted in the cry of the earth.

Finally, we must hear the cry of the poor, but we must be discerning in doing so. The multivalent cry means we must listen to what is at the root of the issues but also for voices that offer ways forward. Attending to the people of Appalachia helps us to see that these voices often come from the margins of the marginalized. It is mothers, Affrilachians, academics, and Christian communities in the region who know spiritual harm but also, because of their marginal status within Appalachia, are less invested in the status quo and so more likely to work for change. They can advocate for solutions to environmental problems that address the physical and spiritual harm done to themselves and others. Moreover, it is their voice that can provide a check on the rich and powerful to keep their appeals to solidarity and the common good from becoming justifications for further exploitation of people and the earth. Far from pitting the rich against the poor, the powerful against the vulnerable, attending to marginalized voices in marginalized communities can provide solutions to environmental problems that bring the rich and poor, powerful and vulnerable, together, and together they have a better chance to genuinely care for their common home.