

Pope Francis' Eco-Encyclical and Walter J. Ong's Thought

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Melville Publishing House in Brooklyn has published Pope Francis' eco-encyclical with an incisive introduction by Naomi Oreskes of Harvard University as the book titled *Encyclical on Climate Change & Inequality: On Care for Our Common Home*. On the back cover, Melville House Publishing has listed it as being a work in political science. No doubt climate change is a hot-button issue in American politics.

The pope's eco-encyclical contains 246 numbered paragraphs, and 172 numbered endnotes. Most of the endnotes give bibliographic information for the sources of quoted statements in the text. Not surprisingly, the document contains a lot of quotations from other popes and from other official church documents.

My impression is that Pope Francis plans to devote the remainder of his time in office to talking up various themes in his eco-encyclical -- for example, during his scheduled visit to the United States in late September 2015. Therefore, in the spirit of dialogue, I propose to undertake a dialogue-commentary on the pope's eco-encyclical.

The present essay will unfold in the following subsections: (1) Some Background Information, (2) Where I'm Coming From, (3) A Bibliographic Digression, (4) Pope Francis' Eco-Encyclical, and (5) A Dialogue with the Pope's Eco-Encyclical.

My thesis about Pope Francis' eco-encyclical is twofold: The pope's call for action about climate change is reasonable and urgent, but Ong has formulated a more viable conceptual framework for discussing the modern world than Pope Francis has constructed from official Catholic views. The pope devotes far more of the encyclical's text to reviewing Catholic thought than he devotes to making the case for the urgency of his call to action.

SOME BACKGROUND INFORMATION

At approximately 38,000 words in length, Pope Francis' eco-encyclical overflows with his church's culture and ideology of absolutism. From his church's spirit of absolutism (e.g., moral absolutes, as interpreted by church officials), he criticizes various forms of what he interprets as "relativism." By definition, relativism is the opposite of absolutism, and vice versa. Pope Francis himself has criticized his church for what he refers to as a clerical culture, or culture of clericalism. No doubt what he refers to as the church's culture of clericalism overlaps with what I refer to as the church's culture and ideology of absolutism.)

However, the church's officials reserve the right to change the church's official teachings. For example, in the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the bishops collectively changed certain

official positions. For example, Vatican II's Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions officially brought to an end centuries of anti-Semitism, and the Declaration on Religious Freedom in effect recognized the American principle of the separation of church and state. As a result of those and other changes initiated by Vatican II, the church's spirit of absolutism might be described as relative – that is, relative absolutism, not totalitarianism. Nevertheless, whatever the church's officials say are the church's current-traditional positions are the church's current-traditional positions, and those positions are promoted with the church's spirit of absolutism.

In any event, Pope Francis overuses the term “relativism” as a multi-purpose term of opprobrium in his eco-encyclical.

In the book *Frontiers in American Catholicism: Essays on Ideology and Culture* (1957), the American Jesuit cultural historian and theorist Walter J. Ong (1912-2003) discusses the Roman Catholic overuse of the term “relativism” as a multi-purpose term of opprobrium (pages 19, 118, and 119). Some of his observations are worth noting.

Ong attributes “the widespread conviction [among American Catholic intellectuals] that what is wrong with the non-Catholic world generally is ‘relativism’ or subjectivism” (page 118). He attributes this widespread conviction to “the American Catholic stress on [the church's] natural law” (page 118).

Ong suggests that “the presence of the Church to the [non-Catholic] American intellectual can perhaps be strengthened by a more sensitive approach to non-Catholic American culture than that which can see nothing but undifferentiated relativism and/or subjectivism” (page 119).

Ong argues that the acceptance of our human incompleteness is not the same as relativism. But he points out that the acceptance of insecurity is an exercise in humility (page 19).

In his densely packed short book *Hopkins, the Self, and God* (1986), the published version of Ong's 1981 Alexander Lectures at the University of Toronto, Ong goes so far as to differentiate so-called “subjectivism” from being subject-oriented. Being subject-oriented does not necessarily involve subjectivism (page 95). Ong notes that “[t]he self for Hopkins is not solipsistic” and “the self in Hopkins is never solipsistic” (pages 40 and 83 respectively; also see page 130).

Now, the Canadian Jesuit philosopher and theologian Bernard Lonergan (1904-1984) is admirably subject-oriented, but without subjectivism in the pejorative sense of the term, in his philosophical masterpiece *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (1957). But Ong apparently did not study Lonergan's *Insight* carefully enough to integrate it into his own work. Conversely, Lonergan did not integrate Ong's thought into his work.

Lonergan's *Insight* can be categorized as study in epistemology. However, instead of characterizing *Insight* as involving a theory of knowledge, it would be more accurate to say that Lonergan works out a theory of knowing.

Because Ong himself characterizes his own phenomenology as centered on noetics, we could also say that he is working out a theory of knowing – which can be related to Lonergan’s theory of knowing.

Ong’s noetic phenomenology can also be related to the semiotic phenomenology that Dennis Sobolev works with in his book *The Split World of Gerard Manley Hopkins: An Essay in Semiotic Phenomenology* (2011).

In *Hopkins, the Self, and God* (1986), Ong returns to and expands certain criticisms of Catholicism that he advances in *Frontiers in American Catholicism* (1957).

In *Hopkins, the Self, and God*, Ong discusses certain nineteenth-century intellectual currents of thought that influenced Hopkins’ graduate study of philosophy and theology as part of his Jesuit training. In effect, Ong is also discussing currents of thought that influenced his own graduate study of philosophy and theology as part of his own Jesuit training at a later time.

In the book *Contending with Modernity: [American] Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century* (1995), Philip Gleason in history at the University of Notre Dame discusses how the nineteenth-century intellectual currents that Ong discusses influenced undergraduate American Catholic education in the twentieth century, most notably in the required core curriculum courses in Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy.

Disclosure: My undergraduate education (1962-1966) in Jesuit institutions included required core curriculum courses in Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy. When I was in the Jesuits (1979-1987), my Jesuit training included further study of philosophy at Saint Louis University, including a course on Lonergan’s *Insight* and three courses on the theme of technology (one taught by Ong – my fifth course from Ong). However, for many years now, I have not been a practicing Catholic. Today I would describe myself as a theistic humanist (such as Eric Voegelin), as distinct from a secular humanist.

Now, in *Hopkins, the Self, and God* (1986), Ong frames the nineteenth-century crisis in the church as involving “the relationship between reason and faith” and as the crisis of rationalism versus fideism (page 93). According to Ong, fideism “would write off reason as quite irrelevant to the faith” (page 93).

Reason here refers to the historical conceptualization of reason in modern philosophy – also known as Rationalism. Thus the nineteenth-century crisis in the church represented the conflict between the modern Age of Reason versus the pre-modern Age of Faith. The pre-modern Age of Faith is associated historically with the emergence and cultural dominance of Christendom in Europe.

Ong himself explores what I refer to as the cultural infrastructures of the art of reason that emerged in modern philosophy (also known as Rationalism) in his massively researched book *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason* (1958). The art of reason emerged in the Age of Reason. In his book Ong about the French logician and educational reformer and Protestant martyr Peter Ramus (1515-1572) shows that

Ramus and his prolific followers were significant transitional figures in the historical emergence of the Age of Reason.

In Ong's 1958 book, and in his subsequent extensive body of work, Ong's thought can be characterized as post-modernist in spirit. He himself characterized his work as phenomenological and personalist in cast.

In *Hopkins, the Self, and God*, Ong reports that "the work of St. Thomas Aquinas . . . had been largely lost sight of in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries" (page 95). Starting with a work published in 1853, the German Jesuit Joseph Kleutgen emerged as "[t]he chief designer of the theological positions and defensive strategies officially adopted" "in the 1870 apostolic constitution of the First Vatican Council *Dei Filius* and in [Pope] Leo XIII's 1878 encyclical *Aeterni Patris*" (page 94). Thus "the crisis [rationalism versus fideism] was met by referring back to the theology and philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas, who was felt to have shown for all ages how to avoid both Scylla and Charybdis, making clear the exact relationship of faith and reason" (page 94).

As part of Ong's Jesuit training, he studied the philosophy and theology of St. Thomas Aquinas.

Now, Ong says, "Hopkins, like [John Henry] Newman, had very little if any of the defensiveness which betrays intellectual insecurity and freezes the mind" (page 92) – in contrast to the "defensive strategies" (Ong's own words) officially adopted by the First Vatican Council and by Pope Leo XIII.

As a rule, fear underlies defensiveness. So we may wonder what the First Vatican Council and Pope Leo XIII feared when they adopted the defensive strategies that Kleutgen had formulated.

Arguably Ong himself expresses his own intellectual defensiveness in his spirited 1951 article "The Lady and the Issue," which he unfortunately reprinted in his book *In the Human Grain: Further Explorations in Contemporary Culture* (1967, pages 188-202).

But in his mature writings Ong himself "had very little if any of the defensiveness which betrays intellectual insecurity and freezes the mind." No doubt Ong's study of philosophy at Saint Louis University with certain good teachers there as part of his Jesuit training contributed much to his own sense of intellectual security.

Because Pope Francis' response about "who am I to judge?" has been so widely publicized by the news media, we can surmise that by the time when he said those words he had overcome his own admitted earlier tendency toward being authoritarian, which is a kind of defensiveness. But he travelled a long road in the process of overcoming his earlier authoritarianism, as Paul Vallely explains in his new book *Pope Francis: The Struggle for the Soul of Catholicism* (2015).

Incidentally, the First Vatican Council officially ruled that the pope is capable of making infallible official rulings regarding matters of faith and morals.

The Second Vatican Council effectively demoted St. Thomas Aquinas from the official status that he and his thought had attained as a result of the First Vatican Council and Pope Leo's XIII's encyclical *Aeterni Patris*.

Nevertheless, Ong says, "Despite its now evident limitations, however, the manual-based scholastic teaching that Hopkins received was far from uninformative. Philosophical analysis of being, finite and infinite, in terms of act and potency, of form and matter, or of substance, property, and accident, and in terms of various causes, was and is still quite possible and can be made challenging, and some of the insights developed by faculty psychology (originally part of 'physics') and a virtue-and-vice ethics were deep and permanently inviting" (pages 96-97).

In an interview originally published in 1971 and reprinted in *An Ong Reader: Challenges for Further Inquiry* (2002, pages 79-109), Ong discusses his own graduate studies in philosophy at Saint Louis University as part of his own Jesuit training:

"I hit Saint Louis University when St. Louis Thomism rose to its first crest, quite vigorously historical and structurally sensitive in the hands of the good teachers. What I learned studying philosophy at Saint Louis University made my work on Ramism possible and has given me a permanent edge over many colleagues around the world. The advantage of the kind of philosophical training we were given was that if you got it, if you studied it, you knew the central intellectual tradition of all Western culture.

"But you didn't know that was what it was unless you knew a lot of things outside philosophy too. So you had something that was a wonderful tremendous asset, provided you could open it up. That's just what many people then failed to do. Others succeeded" (page 98).

No doubt Ong was one who succeeded in opening up the asset he had been given.

Ong characterizes Hopkins as being "truly a proto-existentialist and a proto-personalist thinker" (page 94; I've added the two hyphens here; also see pages 97-99, 121-122). Ong characterizes Martin Buber's *I and Thou* (1923) as "personalist existentialism" (page 21; also see pages 27, 128-129, and 131). Ong characterizes his own work as phenomenological and personalist in cast. Concerning Ong's philosophical thought, see my essay "[Understanding Ong's Philosophical Thought](#)":

The late Maurice Friedman (1921-2012), a leading American exponent of Buber's thought, uses Buber's thought creatively in the anthology *The Worlds of Existentialism: A Critical Reader* (1991; orig. ed., 1964), in the revised edition of his book *Problematic Rebel: Melville, Dostoevsky, Kafka, Camus* (1970; orig. ed., 1963), and in his book *The Healing Dialogue in Psychotherapy* (1985) – and elsewhere.

What Friedman describes as the healing dialogue in psychotherapy can also occur in the context of Jesuit spiritual direction – and in other contexts as well.

In Pope Francis' eco-encyclical, he repeatedly refers to I-thou communication and repeatedly urges dialogue. For example, he says, "Our openness to others, each of whom is a 'thou' capable

of knowing, loving and entering into dialogue, remains the source of our nobility as human persons” (Paragraph 119).

In his eco-encyclical, Pope Francis also refers briefly to how “[c]ultural limitations in different eras often affected the [people’s] perception” (Paragraph 200). Indeed, one central axis of Ong’s mature thought from the early 1950s onward was to call attention to the broad trends involved in perception and conception in Western culture.

Now, in the book *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope* (2014), Austen Ivereigh does an excellent job of contextualizing the life of Pope Francis. Ivereigh devotes a chapter to sketching the future pope’s Jesuit training (pages 40-82). He quotes Pope Francis himself as saying in retrospect that “I studied philosophy [in his Jesuit training] from textbooks that came from decadent or largely bankrupt “Thomism”” (quoted on page 75).

Pope Francis’ characterization of his study of philosophy as part of his Jesuit training stands in striking contrast with Ong’s comments about his own study of philosophy at Saint Louis University as part of his Jesuit training.

However, according to Ivereigh, the future pope ended his three-year study of philosophy by passing his oral exam (conducted in Latin) in 1963 with flying colors (page 76). Ivereigh also reports that the future pope rejected the Enlightenment (pages 63-64). His rejection of the Enlightenment is manifested at times in his eco-encyclical. His rejection of the Enlightenment is part of the larger Roman Catholic cultural heritage that Gleason aptly characterizes in the title of his book as *Contending with Modernity* (1995), mentioned above.

In recent decades it has become fashionable in certain academic circles to critique and thereby distance oneself from the Enlightenment. That kind of critique of the Enlightenment is known as post-modernism.

Interestingly, Ivereigh reports that the Victorian Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins is one of Pope Francis’ favorite poets (page 417). Even though Pope Francis does not mention Hopkins in his eco-encyclical, Hopkins at times expressed concern about ecology and technology, as do numerous literary authors in British and American Romanticism.

WHERE I’M COMING FROM

Before I retired from teaching at the University of Minnesota Duluth at the end of May 2009, I had for years regularly taught an introductory-level humanities course on Literacy, Technology, and Society.

In that course I used Ong’s thought as the general framework. His most widely known and most widely translated densely packed but accessible short book *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (1982) was required reading in the course, because it is a succinct summation of his work from the early 1950s onward.

Disclosure: In my professional publications, I have written extensively about Ong's thought. In the present essay, I will bring his thought into dialogue with Pope Francis' thought in his eco-encyclical. Pope Francis is the first Jesuit pope, but he most likely is not familiar with Ong's work. In his eco-encyclical, Pope Francis does not refer to Ong by name or to any of his publications.

In his eco-encyclical Pope Francis is concerned about technology over "the past two centuries" (Paragraph 46) and of "the last two hundred years" (Paragraph 53). Ong's books *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (1982) and *Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology: Studies in the Interaction of Expression and Culture* (1971) advertise his interest in technology in their titles.

Earlier, Ong had supplied the foreword for the book including a selection of Pope Pius XII's papers about technology, *Pius XII and Technology*, compiled by Leo J. Haigerty (1962, pages vii-x).

Ong also discusses the past two centuries in his books *Interfaces of the Word: Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture* (1977) and *Hopkins, the Self, and God* (1986), mentioned above.

In *Hopkins, the Self, and God*, Ong claims that "the technologies of writing, print, and computers" involve their users in distancing and objectivizing. But he also claims that "the inward turn of consciousness develops in counterbalance with the outward turning implemented by the distancing or 'objectivizing' [involved in using those technologies]" (page 130).

Concerning the inward turn of consciousness, Ong says, "Jean-Jacques Rousseau's view of the 'inner self' as constitutive of human nature marked the beginning of the modern sense of self-possession" (page 140).

But in his eco-encyclical, Pope Francis criticizes "romantic individualism" (Paragraph 119). Romantic individual is here to stay in Western culture. It is part of what Ong refers to as the modern sense of self-possession.

I know, I know, the pope could probably operationally define so-called "romantic individualism" in such a way as to show that it is the opposite of the operationally defined term "the common good." But he does not set forth operational definitions of either of these expressions in his eco-encyclical.

Of course the myth of individualism is often associated with American culture. By definition, the American culture in which political and economic liberalism emerged historically is modern.

By inveighing against "romantic individualism" and so many other historical trends that he himself refers to as "modern," Pope Francis appears to prefer the pre-modern Christendom in Europe. In my estimate, he could have strengthened his call for action on climate change by inveighing less, or not at all, against apparently "modern" trends in Western philosophy and culture.

After all, what C. G. Jung means by individuation is an individualistic attainment – when it does occur.

In connection with Ong's favorable comment about Rousseau, I should mention Neil Postmen's book *Building a Bridge to the 18th Century: How the Past Can Improve Our Future* (1999). He wrote this book in what I would characterize as a conservationist spirit and in the spirit of giving credit where credit is due.

Arguably the Declaration of Independence and the American Revolution were designed to contribute to the common good in American culture.

Arguably the Civil War was undertaken by the North to contribute to the common good in American culture.

Arguably certain New Deal measures instituted in President Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration were designed to contribute to the common good. Even certain measures advanced by President Theodore Roosevelt were designed to contribute to the common good.

Nevertheless, the expression "the common good" is not often used by non-Catholic Americans. Arguably it might be good for non-Catholic Americans to use that expression more often.

But Pope Francis is a shrewd and savvy politician. Perhaps he felt that all of his inveighing would appeal to his conservative Catholic base.

Basically, I think that the pope's call for action on climate change is justified and reasonable and urgent. Nevertheless, I see his repeated inveighing about "modern" trends as unappealing. Methinks he doth protest too much about them.

Now, Pope Francis commends "self-examination" (Paragraph 47). Indeed, he suggests that "[t]rue wisdom [is] the fruit of self-examination, dialogue and generous encounter between persons" (Paragraph 47). Jesuit spirituality encourages such "self-examination, dialogue and generous encounter between persons" in the context of spiritual direction.

No doubt that such "self-examination, dialogue and generous encounter between persons" as part of his Jesuit training contributed to Hopkins' strong ego-structures that Ong mentions (page 39).

In his eco-encyclical Pope Francis is also concerned about the spirit of economic competitiveness. Ong does not happen to advert explicitly to economic competitiveness in his densely packed but short book-length study of the male spirit of competitiveness, *Fighting for Life: Contest, Sexuality, and Consciousness* (1981), the published version of his 1979 Messenger Lectures at Cornell University.

In general, Ong's books in the 1970s and 1980s are irenic in spirit. However, in principle, nothing he says in an irenic spirit would necessarily preclude critiques such as Pope Francis' various critiques in his eco-encyclical.

In his eco-encyclical Pope Francis works with a longstanding Roman Catholic framework of thought about modern philosophy. In Ong's book *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason* (1958), as mentioned above, Ong also works with that longstanding Roman Catholic framework of thought about modern philosophy, at times. Basically, "the Art of Reason" refers to modern philosophy. However, in Ong's subsequent publications, he stopped criticizing modern philosophy. Nevertheless, Ong's criticisms of modern philosophy show that he was working out his version of what has more recently been styled post-modernist thought.

But we may wonder why Ong stopped criticizing modern philosophy, as many other Roman Catholics continued to criticize modern philosophy. Perhaps he had worked the spirit to criticize modern philosophy out of his system. So perhaps he saw no point in beating a dead horse any further.

But it is also possible that the trajectory of Ong's own philosophical thought continued to emerge and develop in such a way that his own emerging philosophical thought stopped him from pursuing his criticism of modern philosophy further.

You see, in his book *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (1967), the expanded version of Ong's 1964 Terry Lectures at Yale's Divinity School, Ong expresses hope about the positive potential of the impact and influence of our contemporary communications media that accentuate sound.

In the lingo of baseball announcers, the communications media that accentuate sound represent a whole new ball game in Western culture. Because modern philosophy can be seen as a byproduct of the print culture that emerged in Western culture after the Gutenberg printing press emerged in the 1450s, it follows that the contemporary communications media in Western culture will most likely serve as a tempering countervailing force against modern philosophy.

I agree with Ong that there is good reason to be hopeful about the positive potential of the impact and influence of our contemporary communications media that accentuate sound.

But I should also note that Ong is silent about any possible negative developments arising from the still emerging impact and influence of the communications media that accentuate sound.

It strikes me that we should think in terms of a breakdown of the old visual cultural conditioning as a breakthrough to a new cultural constellation.

Subjectively, however, the breakdown of the old visual cultural constellation may feel threatening. For this reason, certain people who are heavily invested in the old cultural constellation may strongly resist the breakthrough of new cultural constellation.

For example, market fundamentalism emerged historically in the old visual cultural constellation in Western culture. As a result, market fundamentalists today may understandably strongly resist the kinds of changes that Pope Francis urges in his eco-encyclical.

In more sweeping terms, I would suggest that the communications media that accentuate sound have contributed significantly to the rise and surfacing of various forms of religious fundamentalism involving various religious fundamentalists over the last half century or so – worldwide.

As we noted above, Ong says that a certain kind of defensiveness “betrays intellectual insecurity and freezes the mind.”

No doubt the still emerging cultural conditioning powered by the communications media evoke at times the kind of defensiveness that “betrays intellectual insecurity and freezes the mind.”

Figuratively speaking, we humans on the planet earth today are all on a shake-down cruise together as a brave new world emerges. Thanks in large measure to our contemporary communications media that accentuate sound, a brave new world is in the process of emerging and being born. However, like all human births, this birth is accompanied by pangs of pain. In effect, Pope Francis fears that this process will lead to a still birth as the result of our human tendency to engage in mutually assured destruction through irreparable climate change.

Now, if I posit that Ong successfully navigated the breakthrough that he proclaimed to be hopeful, I have to ask, “How many other Americans or others have also successfully navigated the breakthrough?”

In other words, it appears to me that we have an over-supply of Americans and others who have not yet successfully navigated the breakthrough.

If Pope Francis has successfully navigated the breakthrough, good for him. More power to him. No doubt his call for action on the climate crisis is valid and reasonable and urgent. Nevertheless, the Roman Catholic framework of thought that he sets forth in his eco-encyclical emerged historically in recent centuries in the Roman Catholic Church in the old visual cultural constellation in Western culture – especially his repeated criticisms of various forms of supposed relativisms. So he appears to have one foot firmly planted in the church’s old visual cultural constellation, but he seems to be moving his other foot in the direction of the emerging new cultural constellation in Western culture that Ong navigated successfully.

Now, after Ong had expressed his hope about the positive potential of the impact and influence of our contemporary communication media that accentuate sound, towards the end of *The Presence of the Word* (1967), he did not turn back to the history of philosophy that he had investigated so deeply in *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue* (1958), except in *Hopkins, the Self, and God* (1986). Nor did Ong turn his attention to religious history that he had mentioned in the subtitle of *The Presence of the Word*, except in *Hopkins, the Self, and God*.

Instead, he turned mostly to cultural history in *Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology* (1971), *Interfaces of the Word* (1977), *Orality and Literacy* (1982), and *Hopkins, the Self, and God* (1986). But he meandered into philosophy again in *Fighting for Life: Contest, Sexuality, and Consciousness* (1981).

Because the Mississippi River flows through St. Louis, Missouri, where Ong studied and taught at Saint Louis University, I would liken the flow of the course of Ong's scholarly life to the meandering flow of the Mississippi.

For further discussion of Ong's philosophical thought, see my essay "[Understanding Ong's Philosophical Thought](#)":

Now, in footnote 53 in his eco-encyclical, Pope Francis refers positively to the thought of the French Jesuit paleontologist and spiritual writer Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955). This is the first time that Teilhard has been mentioned in an official church document. During Teilhard's lifetime, Vatican officials blocked the publication of his works about evolutionary theory. However, after his death, his works were published posthumously – and they electrified people. Ong was one of the first American Catholics to call Teilhard's thought to the attention of his fellow American Catholics – in a 1952 journal article. Thereafter Ong never tired of referring to Teilhard's thought.

Ong develops his own views regarding evolutionary theory in three essays in his book *In the Human Grain: Further Explorations of Contemporary Culture* (1967, pages 61-82, 83-98, and 99-126).

For recent translations of Teilhard's two most important books, see *The Human Phenomenon*, translated by Sarah Appleton-Weber (1999; orig. French ed., 1955), and *The Divine Milieu*, translated by Sion Cowell (2004; orig. French ed., 1957).

In my course on Literacy, Technology, and Society, the required reading also included two accessible books by Neil Postman:

- (1) *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (1985);
- (2) *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (1992).

In *Technopoly*, Postman sounds like a catastrophizing technophobe. In Pope Francis' eco-encyclical, he often sounds like a catastrophizing technophobe. (Albert Ellis helped popularize the term "catastrophize.")

But Ong is not a technophobe, nor am I. (However, Hopkins was a bit of a technophobe.)

Other required reading in my course on Literacy, Technology, and Society included the following six novels:

- (1) Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1959)
- (2) Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* (1960)
- (3) Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, Or, The New Prometheus* (1818)

(4) Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward: 2000-1887* (1886)

(5) Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932)

(6) George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1948).

Taken together, those six novels pretty much cover “the past two centuries” and “the last two hundred years” that Pope Francis is concerned about (Paragraphs 46 and 53 respectively).

Pope Francis is concerned about “a Promethean vision of mastery over the world” (Paragraph 116).

Check out Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, Or, The New Prometheus* (1818).

Pope Francis mentions “the nuclear bombs dropped in the middle of the twentieth century” and “totalitarian regimes” that “kill[ed] millions of people” (Paragraph 104).

Check out George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1948).

As I say, I am not a technophobe. But unlike certain uncritical technophiles, I readily acknowledge that technology can be criticized.

As a rule of thumb, I would urge people not to be uncritical technophiles, on the one hand, nor, on the other hand, technophobes.

On the one hand, uncritical technophiles tend to sound like mindless enthusiasts.

On the other hand, technophobes tend to indulge in catastrophizing (Ellis' term).

A BIBLIOGRAPHIC DIGRESSION

For an accessible historical survey of technology in American culture, see the impressive 1,000-page textbook *Inventing America: A History of the United States*, 2nd ed., by Pauline Maier, Merritt Roe Smith, Alexander Keyssar, and Daniel J. Kevles (2006).

But also see Lawrence Buell's wide-ranging historical study *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (1995).

Classic critiques of technology include Jacques Ellul's book *The Technological Society*, translated from the French by John Wilkinson (1964; French orig. ed., 1954) and E. F. Schumacher's book *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered* (1973).

Al Gore's book *Earth in the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit* (1992) is a classic about climate change.

In an endnote accompanying her incisive introduction to Pope Francis' eco-encyclical, Professor Oreskes calls attention to the following four books as noteworthy:

(1) Bill McKibben's *Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future* (2008);

(2) James Gustave Speth's *The Bridge at the End of the World: Capitalism, the Environment, and Crossing from Crisis to Sustainability* (2009);

(3) Paul Gilding's *The Great Disruption: Why the Climate Crisis Will Bring on the End of Shopping and the Birth of a New World* (2012);

(4) Naomi Klein's *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (2014).

In his eco-encyclical, Pope Francis often sounds like a technophobe, especially in certain quotes from Fr. Romano Guardini's book *The End of the Modern World* (see footnotes 83, 84, 85, 87, 92, 144, and 154). The footnotes indicate that the pope is quoting the 9th German edition and that that edition can be found in English translation in the 1998 American edition. (The 1st German ed. was in 1950. The 1st American ed. in English translation was in 1956.)

In the book *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope* (2014), mentioned above, Ivereigh reports that Pope Francis (born in 1936) in 1986 seriously explored the possibility of writing a doctoral dissertation on Guardini (pages 197-200), but he did not do that.

In the book *Frontiers in American Catholicism* (1957), mentioned above, Ong refers to Guardini's book by its German title and discusses it briefly (page 9).

As a result of certain quotes from Guardini as well as Pope Francis' own commentary in his eco-encyclical, both Guardini and Pope Francis sound like technophobes similar in spirit to Postman in his book *Technopoly* (1992), mentioned above.

In certain other respects, Pope Francis' critique of consumerism, which he characterizes as throwaway culture, resembles the spirit of Postman's critique in his book *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1985), also mentioned above.

In the foreword to *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1985, pages vii-viii), Postman discusses both Aldous Huxley's dystopian novel *Brave New World* (1932) and George Orwell's dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1948). Postman says that "Huxley feared that what we love will ruin us" (page viii). In a nutshell, this is a central theme of Pope Francis' eco-encyclical and his critique of throwaway culture and consumerism.

Because consumerism grows out of acting out our desires for things, I should mention Martha C. Nussbaum's clever book *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (1994). In effect, Pope Francis is suggesting that we may need the therapy of desire, although he does not happen to use this expression explicitly.

For another discussion of the therapy of desire that Pope Francis does not mention, see Mortimer J. Adler's accessible book *Desires Right & Wrong: The Ethics of Enough* (1991).

For a bibliography of Ong's 400 or so publications, see the late Thomas M. Walsh's bibliography of Ong's publications, including information about reprintings and translations, in the book *Language, Culture, and Identity: The Legacy of Walter J. Ong, S.J.*, edited by Sara van den Berg and Walsh (2011, pages 185-245).

Also see my book *Walter Ong's Contributions to Cultural Studies: The Phenomenology of the Word and I-Thou Communication*, 2nd ed. (2015; 1st ed., 2000).

POPE FRANCIS' ECO-ENCYCLICAL

Now, despite the numerous quotations from other popes and official church documents, Pope Francis, for understandable reasons, explicitly states that he is addressing "all people of good will," not just practicing Catholics (Paragraph 62). But apart from professional Catholic theologians, and professional journalists and pundits, how many other practicing Catholics are likely to read the pope's lengthy eco-encyclical, and how many other people of good will would be willing to read a document overloaded with so much Roman Catholic ideological baggage? I would liken the flow of the pope's thought in his eco-encyclical to the meandering flow of a long river such as the Mississippi.

The following Paragraph 23 outlines what I consider to be the pope's central concern in his admittedly wide-ranging eco-encyclical:

"The climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all. At the global level, it is a complex system linked to many of the essential conditions for human life. A very solid scientific consensus indicates that we are presently witnessing a disturbing warming of the climatic system. In recent decades the warming has been accompanied by a constant rise in the sea level and, it would appear, by an increase of extreme weather events, even if a scientifically determinable cause cannot be assigned to each particular phenomenon. Humanity is called to recognize the need for changes of lifestyle, production and consumption, in order to combat this warming or at least the human causes which produce or aggravate it.

"It is true that there are other factors (such as volcanic activity, variations in the earth's orbit and axis, the solar cycle), yet a number of scientific studies indicate that most global warming in recent decades is due to the greater concentration of greenhouse gases(carbon dioxide, methane, nitrogen oxides and others) released mainly as a result of human activity. Concentrated in the atmosphere, these gases do not allow the warmth of the sun's rays reflected by the earth to be dispersed in space. The problem is aggravated by a model of development based on the intensive use of fossil fuels, which is at the heart of the worldwide energy system. Another determining factor has been an increase in changed uses of the soil, principally deforestation for agricultural purposes."

(I have typed the above quotation as two paragraphs here, but in the official text of the pope's eco-encyclical, the above-quoted text appears as one continuous paragraph.)

Paragraph 15: “It is my hope that the Encyclical Letter, which is now added to the body of the Church’s social teaching, can help us to acknowledge the appeal, immensity and urgency of the challenge we face.”

Paragraph 14: “I urgently appeal, then, for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of the planet.”

Paragraph 13: “The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change.”

Paragraph 23: “The climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all. At the global level, it is a complex system linked to many of the essential conditions for human life. A very solid scientific consensus indicates that we are presently witnessing a disturbing warming of the climatic system. In recent decades the warming has been accompanied by a constant rise in the sea level and, it would appear, by an increase of extreme weather events, even if a scientifically determinable cause cannot be assigned to each particular phenomenon. Humanity is called to recognize the need for changes of lifestyle, production and consumption, in order to combat this warming or at least the human causes which produce or aggravate it.”

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Paragraph 25: “Climate change is a global problem with grave implications: environmental, social, economic, political and for distribution of goods. It represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day. Its worst impact will probably be felt by developing countries in coming decades. Many of the poor live in areas particularly affected by phenomena related to warming, and their means of subsistence are largely dependent on natural reserves and ecosystemic services such as agriculture, fishing and forestry.”

Paragraph 26: “There is an urgent need to develop policies so that, in the next few years, the emission of carbon dioxide and other highly polluting gases can be drastically reduced, for example, substituting for fossil fuels and developing sources of renewable energy. Worldwide there is minimal access to clean and renewable energy.”

Paragraph 36: “Caring for ecosystems demands far-sightedness, since no one looking for a quick and easy profit is truly interested in their preservation. But the cost of damage caused by such selfish lack of concern is much greater than the economic benefits to be obtained.”

Paragraph 53: “The problem is that we still lack the culture needed to confront this crisis. We lack leadership capable of striking out on new paths and meeting the needs of the present with concern for all and without prejudice towards coming generations. The establishment of a legal framework which can set clear boundaries and ensure the protection of ecosystems has become indispensable; otherwise, the new power structures based on the techno-economic paradigm may overwhelm not only our politics but also freedom and justice.”

Paragraph 56: “In the meantime, economic powers continue to justify the current global system where priority tends to be given to speculation and the pursuit of financial gain, which fail to take the context into account, let alone the effects on human dignity and the natural environment. Here we see how environmental deterioration and human and ethical degradation are closely linked. Many people will deny doing anything wrong because distractions constantly dull our consciousness of just how limited and finite our world really is.”

Paragraph 57: “What would induce anyone, at this stage, to hold on to power only to be remembered for their inability to take action when it was urgent and necessary to do so?”

Paragraph 60: “[T]here is no one path to a solution. . . . [But] the present world system is certainly unsustainable from a number of points of view.”

No doubt Pope Francis has mastered the intricacies of climate change.

No doubt the pope’s call to action is urgent.

On page xiii, Professor Oreskes correctly notes that Pope Francis does not use the term “capitalism” in his eco-encyclical. No doubt the pope was wise not to use the term “capitalism” in his eco-encyclical, because he is not advancing an alternative economic system to replace capitalism. Instead, he is expressing a wide range of criticisms of various problems that he sees as somehow connected with capitalism.

Instead of using the term “capitalism,” Pope Francis refers to markets and the ideology of the marketplace.

Professor Oreskes says, “The pope is not asking us to reject markets or technology. He is asking us to reject the (il)logic that insists that only markets can decide our future and that technology is politically and morally neutral. He is asking us to reject the creed of market fundamentalism” (page xxiv).

As Professor Oreskes explains, Pope Francis is asking us “to recognize that the [economic] system has levers [and that] individuals, institutions, and governments . . . have the capacity to make different [choices regarding those levers]” (page xxiv).

No doubt the pope’s well founded and reasonable call for action will evoke dialogue and debate – and most likely the kind of defensiveness in certain market fundamentalists that Ong says “betrays intellectual insecurity and freezes the mind,” mentioned above.

A DIALOGUE WITH THE POPE'S ECO-ENCYCLICAL

Professor Oreskes refers to the ideology that Pope Francis critiques as the ideology of no ideology (page xvi). She says, "Economists and other 'realists' insist that their worldview is non-ideological: that capitalist liberal democracy is the inevitable end point of human development, and that attempts to direct the economic system towards more equitable outcomes at best gum up the works, and at worst are fatally counterproductive" (page xvi).

But the pope's critique of how the current supposedly non-ideological economic system operates is based on how its operation has failed in three important ways (pages xvi-xxi). From the pope's incisive critique of its operation, he moves to a call for action to establish "a legal framework which can set clear boundaries and ensure the protection of ecosystems" (quoted by Professor Oreskes on page xxii).

As Professor Oreskes puts it, "we must move past the ideology of no ideology, [which is in effect the supposed] morality of amorality" (page xxiii).

Now, in the Paragraph 123, Pope Francis attributes "the sexual exploitation of children" to the so-called "culture of relativism."

But nowhere in his encyclical letter does he even mention the international priest-sex abuse scandal in the Roman Catholic Church, which can be attributed to the church's culture of absolutism that exalts bishops and priests.

Concerning the priest-sex-abuse scandal, see (1) Robert Blair Kaiser's book *Whistle: Fr. Tom Doyle's Steadfast Witness of Clerical Sexual Abuse* (2015) and (2) Kieran Tapsell's book *Potiphar's Wife: The Vatican's Secret and Child Sexual Abuse* (2014).

In the spirit of giving credit where credit is due, I should give Pope Francis credit for appointing a Pontifical Commission for Protecting Minors to advise him about possible positive steps that he as pope might take to protect minors in the future. Fr. Tom Doyle is a consultant to that Pontifical Commission. However, it remains to be seen if it will make any salient recommendations for significant changes in the church's canon law that Pope Francis could enact.

No doubt the church's culture and ideology of absolutisms contributed to "a numbing of conscience" in the Roman Catholic popes and bishops (see Paragraph 49).

In addition, Professor Oreskes stresses the pope's emphasis on "our mutual interconnection with one another and with nature in all its complexity" (page xxii).

In various places Pope Francis invokes St. Francis of Assisi's "Canticle of Brother Sun." In addition, Pope Francis repeatedly endorses the spirit of communion that St. Francis of Assisi expresses in his "Canticle."

Concerning St. Francis of Assisi's "Canticle," see Eloi Leclerc's book *The Canticle of Creatures: Symbols of Union: An Analysis of St. Francis of Assisi*, translated by Matthew J. O'Connell (1977; orig. French ed., 1970).

The general orientation that Pope Francis favors and recommends is consistent with the medieval creation spirituality that Matthew Fox writes about in his two books:

- (1) *Sheer Joy: Conversations with Thomas Aquinas on Creation Spirituality* (1992); and
- (2) *Passion for Creation: The Earth-Honoring Spirituality of Meister Eckhart* (2000).

Incidentally, Jung frequently refers to the medieval mystic Meister Eckhart.

Concerning Aquinas, also see the following three books:

- (1) A. N. Williams' *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (1999);
- (2) Daria Spezzano's *The Glory of God's Grace: Deification According to St. Thomas Aquinas* (2015); and
- (3) Bernhard Blankenhorn's *The Mystery of Union with God: Dionysian Mysticism in Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas* (2015);

Concerning C. G. Jung's thought about psycho-spiritual deification, see my essay "Understanding Jung's Thought":

<https://d-commons.d.umn.edu:8443/handle/10792/2576>

Now, in the spirit of giving credit where credit is due, I am willing to give credit to medieval Catholic thought and expression that may be due. No doubt gems of medieval Catholic thought and expression should be valued for the purposes of contemplation, as should gems of biblical and other ancient thought and expression, and as should gems of other religious and cultural traditions.

But we should not over-value gems of thought and expression from past eras.

On a more personal level, the spirit of communion that Pope Francis endorses (see Paragraphs 91 and 92, for example) involves the dimension of communion in the human psyche that David Bakan, a Jewish faculty member in psychology at the University of Chicago, discusses in his book *The Duality of Human Existence: An Essay on Psychology and Religion* (1966).

In the 700-page textbook *The Psychology of Gender*, now in its 4th edition, Vicki S. Helgeson in psychology at Carnegie-Mellon University reports on her own research and the research of other using operational definitions of Bakan's terms agency and communion.

Pope Francis' emphasis in his eco-encyclical on the importance of love is consistent with Martha C. Nussbaum's emphasis on love in her book *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice* (2013).

Now, in Paragraph 114, Pope Francis asserts, correctly in my estimate, that “[s]cience and technology are not neutral.”

Similarly, the Roman Catholic Church is not neutral. On the contrary, its culture and ideology of absolutism is like a cancer eating away at practicing Catholics.

In response to Pope Francis' call to action, we need a call to action against the Roman Catholic Church and its culture and ideology of absolutism. The church's culture and ideology of absolutism encourages practicing Catholics, including bishops and priests, to be Catholic fundamentalists.

Pope Francis' inveighing against various forms of what he himself styles as “relativism” shows that he is uncritical about his church's mistaken and misguided claims of absolutism (e.g., the claim that the pope can make infallible statements about faith and morals).

His church's and his own implicit absolutism bespeak closed-systems thinking, not open-systems thinking.

Nevertheless, Pope Francis repeatedly refers to openness as desirable (see Paragraph 119, for example). But he is closed to changing a wide range of misguided and mistaken church teachings. For him, all church teachings are non-negotiable. But otherwise he favors openness and dialogue.

Concerning open-systems thinking, see Fritjof Capra and Pier Luigi Luisi's book *The Systems View of Life: A Unifying Vision* (2014) and Ong's essay “Voice and the Opening of Closed Systems” in his book *Interfaces of the Word: Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture* (1977, pages 305-341).

In Paragraph 121, Pope Francis says, “We need to develop a new synthesis capable of overcoming the false arguments of recent centuries.”

But the Roman Catholic Church needs to develop a new synthesis capable of overcoming the inadequate arguments of Roman Catholic natural-law moral theory, which leads to the ridiculous anti-abortion stance that Pope Francis and the other bishops endorse (see Paragraph 120; also see Paragraph 117).

A more adequate moral theory would be based on Kantian deontological moral theory.

In the book *Render Unto Darwin: Philosophical Aspects of the Christian Right's Crusade Against Science* (2007), my former UMD colleague (we're both retired now), James H. Fetzer works out a reasonable position about legalized abortion in the first trimester, based on deontological moral theory (pages 95-148).

In the Paragraph 200, Pope Francis refers to “the treasures of wisdom” about “love, justice and peace” found in certain religious traditions.

But in my estimate, Pope Francis manifests no wisdom in his eco-encyclical, despite the fact that he sees himself as imparting what he mistakes as Roman Catholic wisdom.

Next in Paragraph 200, Pope Francis also says, “Cultural limitations in different eras often affected the perception of these ethical and spiritual treasures.”

Now, from the early 1950s onward, Ong devoted himself to delineating how certain broad cultural orientations affected people’s perception and conception.

With reference to Western cultural history, Ong centers his attention on the aural-to-visual shift in sensibilities in his book *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue* (1958), mentioned above. To this day, that densely packed book repays careful study and contemplation, as do all of Ong’s densely packed books and essays.

In this densely packed book, Ong delineates the aural-to-visual shift in perception and conception. On page 338, note 54, Ong explicitly acknowledges that he has borrowed the aural-visual contrast from the French Catholic philosopher Louis Lavelle (1883-1951), most notably from Lavelle’s book *La Parole et l’Ecriture*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1942).

Andrea Wilson Nightingale’s book *Spectacles in Classical Greek Philosophy: Theoria in its Cultural Context* (2004) strengthens Ong’s and Lavelle’s claim about the visual tendency in ancient Greek philosophical thought.

But the import of Ong’s post-modern philosophical thought about the aural-to-visual shift in perception and conception is not easy to grasp.

You see, Ong does not favor the aural sensibility, nor the visual sensibility. Instead, he favors critical awareness regarding both, over against the uncritical approach he cautions that the unwary might take (page 70). Thus Ong himself is wary against both the aural sensibility and the visual sensibility, both of which involve what he refers to as a corpuscular sense of mental activity (pages 65-66, 72, 146, 171, 196, 203, 210, and 286).

Ong’s post-modern philosophical critique of visualist tendencies in Western philosophy is compatible with Lonergan’s post-modern critique his philosophical masterpiece *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (1957), mentioned above, of the tendency of Western philosophy to equate knowing with “taking a good look.” (After Lonergan [1904-1984] completed his philosophical masterpiece, he taught theology at the Jesuit-sponsored Gregorian University in Rome for about a decade or so. At the present time, the University of Toronto Press is slowly but surely publishing the *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*.)

In his eco-encyclical, Pope Francis repeatedly refers to dialogue. Ong also repeatedly refers to dialogue in his 1958 book and in many of his subsequent publications.

In his eco-encyclical, Pope Francis says, “There can be no ecology without an adequate anthropology” (Paragraph 118). But he is not referring to the field of study known in academia as anthropology. In the church’s parlance, the pope is referring to a theory of the human person.

No doubt Ong’s philosophical thought about the aural-to-visual shift in perception and conception could be described as his anthropology.

So could Ong’s philosophical anthropology provide his church with a new synthesis capable of overcoming some of the Roman Catholic inveighing against the modern world? Perhaps it could.

See my essay “Understanding Ong’s Philosophical Thought”:

<https://d-commons.d.umn.edu:8443/handle/10792/2696>

Ong’s new synthesis might at least contribute to tempering Roman Catholic inveighing against the modern world.

But all of the Roman Catholic inveighing against the modern world appeals to the understandable human tendency to catastrophize (Ellis’ term).

No doubt the human tendency to catastrophize can be enormously appealing.

In Pope Francis’ eco-encyclical letters, he manifests a strong tendency to catastrophize at times.

Nevertheless, in my estimate, the pope’s call for action is basically valid and timely and urgent. No doubt action is needed.