

CATHOLICISM & ANIMAL ETHICS

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Abstract

I am convinced that given the teachings of the Catholic Church, they suggest some kind of a change in our diets given our current animal agriculture system - veganism being what I have concluded as a reasonable "ideal" (not that it isn't without its faults and is, of course, subject to variation given certain contexts). This conclusion is more specific to America given our general wealth and my lack of knowledge pertaining to other countries. I am seeking to discuss the thoughts, insights, objections, etc. of Catholic priests and then analyze any recurring themes, thought processes, frameworks, etc. that are at work among the Catholic leaders. I approached this using a qualitative methodology. This project is very much an ethnographic study with a philosophical/theological analyzation. The aim of this project is to see, from a complete Catholic perspective, if a vegan-diet is in fact the logical conclusion of the Catholic Church in today's animal agriculture system. I will attempt to fully explain the positions of priests in this study and the thoughts behind them, but do note that I am not a theologian or clergy member of the Catholic Church and further research will most likely be required to fully understand the positions of the priests. Topics of discussion will be as follows: Hierarchy of Being, what value animals have, what is allowed in relation to animals in Catholicism, Dominion & Stewardship, animal rights, speciesism, the Animal Food System, animal welfare, environmental impact, Pro-Life connection, the current vegan movement, Adopting a Vegan-Diet as part of an Individual's Catholic Faith, and Veganism as a gesture. Subjects to be interviewed must be male ordained priests of the Catholic Church from any race/ethnicity & age in the Central Texas area (San Antonio,

San Marcos, Austin area) - specifically in Central Texas due to practical reasons relating to travel. A total of 7 priests were interviewed in this study and were spread throughout the area specified above. Age of priests were between around 30 and 75 years old. Scheduling and place of meeting was discussed privately and agreed upon between myself and the priest. An informed consent document was given and signed by the priests prior to the interview. Priests were free to decline to answer any question, challenge a question, skip a question if they lacked knowledge of the subject, or leave the interview if they so wished. No penalty of any kind was given in reaction to any of these scenarios. It is crucial to understand that this thesis is evaluating the issue of a vegan-diet from a complete Catholic perspective. Critiques, thoughts, implications, etc. are all operating from and within the teachings of the Catholic Church. My findings were as follows: Most of the priests agreed that veganism can serve as a part of one's faith, however, there is absolutely no obligation to do so. With that comes the responsibilities of upholding the Order of Creation and must never attempt to elevate animals to that of humans. A Catholic must also prioritize actions in response to the Order of Creation as well. Based on the responses of the priests, they do seem to suggest a change in diet, however, only one priest explicitly stated this. Essentially, a vegan-diet can work as a response to the issues surrounding factory farms, but it does not have to be the response. What I can hold as universal is that Catholicism would call for a more sustainable food system with greatly improved animal welfare conditions as well as an overall greater simplicity of life. In conclusion, while a vegan-diet is not an obligation, there is absolutely good reason to do so.

*This paper is organized into eight major sections of content.
General descriptions are provided under the title of each section
page.*

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Section 1: Background Info

In this section, I will be discussing the preface, purpose, and introduction of the thesis. In addition, the methods used for this paper will be provided as well.

Preface

The origins of this paper are as follows. During my Fall 2017 semester, I took the HON 2304B: Eating Animals course where I was first really exposed to concrete arguments about veganism (for & against). It was here that I concluded that veganism could fit into Catholicism (after all it preaches kindness and gentleness with all God's creatures). After talking with faculty, we decided to frame the research project around a series of interviews where I would pose questions to priests (which can be thought of as experts in the field of Catholicism) that addressed the same information that I was making my conclusion on. To gain the most out of this project, the interviews were designed not as a debate, but as a comprehensive interview. I present the arguments in question form in order for them to address information without having them dispute the arguments directly (so it is a different take on the information rather than a debate). This way, the priests are able to address the common arguments for veganism as it pertains within Catholicism. To be clear, I am doing two things here: 1) Gathering data about how American Catholic priests in central Texas think about veganism 2) Soliciting peer-review on my ideas about a Catholic-motivated vegan-diet. I did my best to leave these questions as open-ended as possible, but also communicate the approach of the arguments as well. That said, I attempted to frame the questions within Catholicism rather than on secular grounds. Due to this a lot of the paper will contain Catholic material as a reference. In this way, the priests and the audience are able to see how these two (Catholicism and veganism) mesh. Also, my interest is to see if a change in diet is an implication within Catholicism itself rather than as a response to something outside of it.

In my opinion, this would be the more interesting find compared to a totally unobligated response by individuals where their Catholic faith is not a reference in the slightest.

Purpose

I am convinced that the teachings of the Catholic Church, suggest some kind of a change in our diets given our current animal agriculture system - veganism being what I have concluded as a reasonable "ideal" (not that it isn't without its faults and is, of course, subject to variation given certain contexts). This conclusion is more specific to America given our general wealth and my lack of knowledge pertaining to other countries. I am seeking to discuss the thoughts, insights, objections, etc. of Catholic priests and then analyze any recurring themes, thought processes, frameworks, etc. that are at work among the Catholic leaders and demonstrate the contours of this argument. I approached this using a qualitative research methodology. This project is very much an ethnographic study with a philosophical/theological analysis. The aim of this project is to see, from a Catholic perspective, if a vegan-diet is in fact the logical conclusion of the Catholic Church in today's animal agriculture system. I will attempt to fully explain the positions of priests in this study and the thoughts behind them, but do note that I am not a theologian or clergy member of the Catholic Church and further research will most likely be required to fully understand the positions of the priests.

Introduction

It is crucial to understand that this thesis is evaluating the issue of a vegan-diet from a complete Catholic perspective. By this I mean, no outside philosophical framework, moral system, religion, etc. were used to discuss the information or make conclusions. While I do reference Aristotle, this is used as a tool of understanding rather as grounds on which to process the information. Critiques, thoughts, implications, etc. are all operating from and within the teachings of the Catholic Church. This paper will also discuss speciesism, animal rights, and abortion as these issues relate to this thesis using a Catholic perspective. It is then important put oneself in the mind of the Catholic Church to fully understand the responses and thoughts given by the priests during the interviews, especially during the discussion of these particular topics.

After conducting the interviews and working through all the responses and references, I hold that a change in diet – a reduction of animal products in an individual’s diet – where a vegan diet is an ideal, is consistent with Catholic teaching. However, this does come with a few qualifiers. This must not be presented as an obligation of Catholicism because eating animals is allowed, justified, and is meant for human flourishing. Rather, it must come as a response to the issues involved in the sourcing of animal products in contrast to the attitude that it is wrong to eat animals (this would be in contradiction of Catholic teaching). So, there is, in fact, a responsibility in practicing a vegan diet if a Catholic chooses to do so. When presented in this way, most of the priests stated that they would indeed support this view. Also, it is my opinion that if the priests interviewed (and Catholics in general) knew much more about factory farms and the issues they pose for creation as a whole, they would emphasize a change in diet. That

being said, there are a lot of human issues to be dealt with presently, so the lack of knowledge is understandable, but this does not excuse all responsibility from a response to factory farms by individuals or even the Catholic Church. Rather, this calls for an increase in awareness of all that they engage in and an increase in demand of transparency of the producers from which they purchase their goods. From here, Catholics can adequately respond in a way that is appropriate from within the framework of their faith.

It is also important to understand that I only discuss the diet aspect of veganism and not veganism as a lifestyle (where all products used/consumed are non-animal products). Therefore, I cannot comment on the matter as I have no references to industries outside of food-related areas or posed any questions to the priests pertaining to these aspects of veganism. I do my best to use the term “vegan-diet” to alleviate any confusion.

In this paper I include numerous references to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC). The Catechism is the book that sums up the essential beliefs, doctrine, and principles of the Catholic Church. It contains in it a variety of topics concerning the Catholic faith which also includes addressing abortion, animals, hierarchy of being, and the nature of humans and God. These latter topics in the Catechism will be of importance to this paper.

In the interviews conducted I asked questions concerning Matthew Scully’s Pro-Life, Pro Animal paper. Matthew Scully is an author, writer, and journalist. He has authored *Dominion: The Power of Man, the Suffering of Animals*, and the *Call to Mercy*, has written speeches for President Bush, Vice Presidents Dan Quayle & Dick Cheney,

and for Pennsylvania Governor Robert Casey. He has been published in the *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post* and *the New York Times*.¹¹ He has also worked as the literary editor with the *National Review*.¹¹ My main purpose in the paper is addressing his Pro-Life Pro-Animal paper. In the issue of abortion, the Catholic Church's stance is firmly Pro-Life. So, naturally, I decided to ask the priests questions concerning his claims and connections Scully makes in his paper.

Another major reference for this paper is Pope Francis' encyclical on the environment: *Encyclical letter Laudato si of the Holy Father Francis, On care for our common home*. Pope Francis is the head of the Catholic Church and oversees the Church as a whole. Papal encyclicals, encyclicals written by the Pope, are letters over various topics/areas written for a particular audience of Bishops or Bishops worldwide. In this encyclical, Pope Francis is addressing the environment, correct understanding of stewardship & dominion, and appropriate responses by Catholics to the issues of today concerning the environment. The factory farms today present environmental and welfare issues which while not addressed explicitly in Pope Francis' encyclical, can be addressed using the ideas and comments contained within it.

The Catholic Encyclopedia is also referenced. This gives the readers full and authoritative information on Catholicism. Essentially, it is an encyclopedia dedicated to understanding Catholicism.

I also mention the works of St. Thomas Aquinas. St. Thomas Aquinas, a doctor of the Catholic Church (saints who have made a significant contribution to theology/doctrine of the Catholic Church), was a 13th century Dominican priest (a priest of the Dominican religious order of the Catholic Church) who is an immensely influential

philosopher and theologian. He was very much influenced by the works of Aristotle, but was not afraid to differ from the philosopher. He has made significant contributions to the Catholic Church through his writings, his most popular being the *Summa Theologica*. As the title indicates, it is Aquinas' brilliant attempt at a summary of all Christian thought, all that can be known about God, and humanity's relation with God.

Lastly, since this topic is concerning Catholicism, a religion based in biblical roots and tradition, I will also be referencing the Holy Bible NABRE (New American Bible Revised Edition).

Asterisks (*) are used in this paper to signal a reference a footnote below which provides either clarifying information or further information. Superscript numbers (#) are also used to signal a reference to a resource which are listed in the *References* section. I would like to add that quotes from priests will not include a reference number as they are from live interviews and no reference exists for the reader to look up. If at the end of a sentence, the reference is addressing the idea presented in the whole sentence. If after a quote, the reference is addressing a word for word excerpt from the corresponding reference. If before a section of quotes (#:), the section below is from the corresponding reference. If superscript numbers (#) are provided before a sentence in reference to a Bible verse, the number is indicating the verse number rather than a reference. Also, superscript numbers are used within the Catechism. In sections where the Catechism is referenced, the superscript numbers after the excerpt can be ignored as they are used for the Catechism and not this paper (For example, there are superscript numbers in the 100s which obviously do not correspond with my reference list as I only have 15). The interview questions provided below are exactly how they looked like for myself during

the interview. This is why the references are in parentheses rather than with a superscript number - for greater ease during the interview.

I will start off by describing the methods used to conduct the interviews. Then I will provide the interview questions. The first two questions are very open-ended where the priests are able to lay the foundation of animals as it pertains to Catholicism. The following questions consist of asking the priests to comment specifically on evidence – factual, scriptural, and ecclesiastical. I also include questions that I would not personally use so as to present all approaches that I can anticipate another taking (this would be the minority of the questions). In the interview questions, some have under them the word “if”. This is used for an anticipated response from which I would pose the following information or question. If the anticipated response was not given, the follow up question/information was not asked/given. Question #7 was posed as a response to quotes from Pope Francis’ encyclical on the environment. Priest were given these quotes to read and then asked to respond. Question #9 poses a question and then has quotes from Pope Francis’ encyclical on the environment which the priests were then able to respond to.

Methods

Subjects to be interviewed must be male* ordained priests of the Catholic Church from any race/ethnicity & age in the Central Texas area (San Antonio, San Marcos, Austin area) - specifically in Central Texas due to practical reasons relating to travel.

*Priests in the Catholic Church are all male. This topic will not be discussed, but I encourage you to research the Church’s reasoning behind this if this is of interest to you. A great starting point is the Catechism of the Catholic Church – Part 2 Section 2 Chapter 3 Article 6: The Sacrament of Holy Orders.

A total of 7 priests were interviewed in this study and were spread throughout the area specified above. Age of priests were between around 30 and 75 years old**. Scheduling and place of meeting was discussed privately and agreed upon between myself and the priest. An informed consent document was given and signed by the priests prior to the interview. Priests were free to decline to answer any question, challenge a question, skip a question if they lacked knowledge of the subject, or leave the interview if they so wished. No penalty of any kind was given in reaction to any of these scenarios.

Any identifying information such as name of priest, name of parish***, city/diocese of parish, contact information of any kind, etc. will not be included or disclosed to anyone other than Texas State University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) or legal authorities if required and provided all necessary and appropriate steps have been taken. Priests will be referenced as Priest A-H. Priest label was assigned via an online letter randomizer. No compensation was offered to participants in this study. Some sections do not include quotes from all priests. This is because I either felt that their answer was more appropriate for another section or the answer did not directly address the question adequately.

**Actual ages were not obtained

*** Catechism of the Catholic Church #515: A parish is a certain community of the Christian faithful stably constituted in a particular church, whose pastoral care is entrusted to a pastor (*parochus*) as its proper pastor (*pastor*) under the authority of the diocesan bishop.²

Interview Questions

- 1) How are animal's valued in God's eyes? Do they have intrinsic value? Also, how are they valued compared to humans?

- 2) Is the mistreatment/abuse of animals wrong? If so, in what contexts?

- 3) The Catechism of the Catholic Church states in #2416: "Animals are God's creatures. He surrounds them with his providential care. By their mere existence they bless him & give him. Thus, men owe them kindness. We should recall the gentleness with which saints like St. Francis of Assisi or St. Philip Beri treated animals." (Catechism, #2416) What would you say kindness means here?
 - a. Is it universal or only to certain animals?
 - i. Why?
 - ii. *If only certain animals-* How would you say is the best way to make the distinction then? Are there any scriptural references?
 1. *Pope Francis: "' For you love all things that exist, and detest none of the things that you have made; for you would not have made anything if you had hated it' (Wis 11:24). Every creature is thus the object of the Father's tenderness, who gives it its place in this world. (Encyclical letter, Ch. 2, III. The Mystery of the Universe, #77)*
 2. *"The Canadian Bishops rightly pointed out that no creature is excluded from this manifestation of God: 'From*

panoramic vistas to the tiniest life form, nature is a source of wonder and awe. It is a continuing revelation of the divine.” (Encyclical letter, Ch. 2, IV. The Message of Each Creature in the Harmony of Creation, #85)

b. Given the treatment of animals in our food system, would you say kindness is being shown to animals? (How aware are you of how animals are treated in factory farms?)

i. If they are not aware of treatment of animals:

1. Confinement systems – massively crowded, allowing for minimal movement
2. Subject to chronic and production-related diseases
3. Unable to exhibit natural behaviors
4. Physically altered to avoid future injury – usually altered while completely conscious (clipped beaks/horns, tails docked)

(Commission, 33)

ii. Pope Francis points out that how we treat animals is important:

1. *“It follows that our indifference or cruelty towards fellow creatures of this world sooner or later affects the treatment we mete out to our other human beings...Every act of cruelty towards any creatures is ‘contrary to human*

dignity’’. (Encyclical letter, Ch. 2, V. Universal
Communion, #92)

4) The Catechism of the Catholic Church states in #2418: “It is contrary to human dignity to cause animals to suffer & die needlessly...”. (Catechism, #2418) What would you say constitutes need? How strict is the word “needlessly” to be interpreted?

- i. *If for food* – Are there moral standards to which we should uphold the sourcing of our food? If so, what are they?
- ii. *If to feed the starving* – Feeding people animals is currently an inefficient system both in (financial) resources and in the conservation of energy through the food chain. Wouldn’t you say a more efficient type of food would be better for that goal? (Also, there is currently enough food to feed everyone, the distribution of food is actually is at fault right now.)

5) I went on a Catholic retreat called Bobcat Awakening, and in that a quote stuck with me: “Most people think that the opposite of love is hate. However, the opposite of love is use.” (Also, indifference) Can you comment on this quote?

a. How far does our love extend?

- i. “Your every act should be done with love” – 1 Corinthians 16:13-14 (NABRE)

6) In Genesis 9:3 it states: “Every shall be food for you; I give all to you, as I gave the green plant.” (NABRE) However, earlier in Genesis 9:2 it states: The fear of you and the terror of you will be on every beast of the earth and on every bird of the sky; with everything that creeps on the ground, and all the fish of the sea, into your hands are they given (NABRE). Would you say that the phrase “into your hands are they given” can also refer to stewardship and/or dominion over animals?

a. Pope Francis: “*An inadequate presentation of Christian anthropology gave rise to a wrong understanding of the relationship between human beings in the world. Often what was handed on was a Promethean vision of mastery over the world...Instead, our ‘dominion’ over the universe should be understood more properly in the sense of responsible stewardship.* (Encyclical letter, Ch. 3, III. The Crisis and Effects of Modern Anthropocentrism, #116)

b. What is involved in having dominion/stewardship over/towards animals?
What does that look like in today’s world?

7) Pope Francis discusses the relationship between Genesis 1:28 & Genesis 2:15:

- “[Genesis] grants man ‘dominion’ over the earth” (Gen 1:28) (NABRE)

- *“We must forcibly reject the notion that our being created in God’s image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over the other creatures.”*
 - *“‘The earth is the Lord’s’ (Ps 24:1); to him belongs ‘the earth with all that is within it’ (Dt 10:14). Thus, God rejects every claim to absolute ownership: ‘The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with me’ (Lev 25:23).”*
- *“The biblical texts are to be read in their context...recognizing that they tell us to ‘till and keep’ the garden of the world. (cf. Gen 2:15)*
 - *‘Tilling’ referring to cultivating, ploughing, or working, while ‘keeping’ means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving.*

(Encyclical letter, Ch. 2, II. The Gospel of Creation, #67)

- 8) Do you think that the mass production of animals is morally right from a Catholic perspective?
- 9) Do you think that the environment and/or animals are involved in a Catholic’s faith in any way?
 - a. Pope Francis states:

- i. *“Christians in their turn “realize that their responsibility within creation, and their duty towards nature and the Creator, are an essential part of their faith”.* (Encyclical letter, Ch. 1, I. The Light offered by Faith, #64)

- ii. *“Clearly the Bible has no place for a tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures.”* (Encyclical letter, Ch. 2, II. The Gospel of Creation, #67)

- iii. *“Our relationship with the environment can never be isolated from our relationship with others and with God. Otherwise, it would be nothing more than romantic individualism dressed up in ecological garb, locking us into a stifling immanence”* (Encyclical letter, Ch. 3, III. The Crisis and Effects of Modern Anthropocentrism, #119)

Can you comment on this?

10) What kind of emphasis do you think the current vegan movement places on animals?

11) Do you worry veganism as a movement currently puts too much focus and/or value on animals?

- a. So, would you support those adopting a diet that reduces/eliminates meat as an extension of God’s love?

i. Should they make their reasoning louder or no?

12) In reference to environmental efforts such as making public transportation more efficient, cleaning up polluted bodies of water, or reusing materials, Pope Francis states:

- a. *“These achievements do not solve global problems, but they do show that men and women are still capable of intervening positively. For all our limitations, gestures of generosity, solidarity and care cannot but well up within us, since we were made for love.”* (Encyclical letter, Ch. 1, VI. Weak Responses, #58)
- b. *“We must not think that these efforts are not going to change the world. They benefit society, often unbeknown to us, for they call forth a goodness which, albeit unseen, inevitably tends to spread.”* (Encyclical letter, Ch. 6, II. Educating for the Covenant between Humanity and the Environment, #212)

Would it be a valid to say that a vegan-diet could serve as a gesture of good pertaining to animals in reference to human impact on animal welfare or the environment for example?

13) Pope Francis has spoken very seriously on the importance of taking care of the environment, being Mother Earth’s caretakers. The current food system is not

efficient (it uses way more resources in comparison to the products it produces). It is currently unsustainable and is harmful to the environment. Examples include: 1) Large amounts of methane from cows being produced 2) Run-off liquids contaminated nearby water sources.

- a. Pope Francis: *“It is my hope that our seminaries and houses of formation will provide an education in responsible simplicity of life, in grateful contemplation of God’s world, and in concern for the needs of the poor and the protection of the environment.* (Encyclical letter, Ch. 6, II. Educating for the Covenant between Humanity and the Environment, #214)

What are your thoughts on this connection and hope of Pope Francis?

14) Would you agree that consumerism is a core part of the society of the United States?

- a. How does the church look upon consumerism? Is it good or bad?
 - i. A big critique on consumerism is that it encourages people to put too much value on material goods. Do you agree? If so, is it bad as Catholics to be swayed by consumerism? (Matthew 6:24 – “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth”)

15) It has been observed that with an increase in wealth, increases in meat consumption typically also rise. Would you agree that our meat consumption is excessive?

- a. Would you agree that it is wrong to enjoy this excess while so many go hungry? Would you agree that this enjoyment of excess is a directly linked to consumerism?
- b. Should there be a more efficient food system?

16) Matthew Scully attempts to connect the Pro-Life movement with a Pro-Animal attitude. In the interest of establishing a foundation for further questions, is the Catholic Church Pro-Life in regards to abortion and is this in all instances?

17) He observes the routine and normality of abortions, which he identifies as making abortion all the worse.

- a. “The factory farms... are places of immense and immense suffering. And though the moral stakes are not the same as with abortion, the moral habits are, relying in both cases on the averted gaze and a smothering of empathy. (Scully).
- b. He also references the Catholic Encyclopedia in identifying “a direct and essential sinfulness of the cruelty to the animal world”, continuing in saying “The offence is presumably greater when cruelty is commonplace and systematic...making customers complacent (Scully).

What are your thoughts?

18) Matthew Scully also mentions that “Pope Benedict XVI cautioned against ‘the degrading of living creatures to a commodity,’ with reference to the ‘industrial use of animals.’” (Scully) Would you care to comment?

19) Commenting directly on factory farms, Matthew Scully states: “Factory farming amount to a complete subordination of animal life to human convenience...” – a theme also present in the “abortion culture” (Scully).

- a. Do you think this is a fair comparison? If so, are the implications? If not, why?

20) In reference to the welfare present in factory farms, Matthew Scully labels it as “cruelty” and therefore considers it wrong and “wrong in every instance” (Scully). Do you agree?

21) Lastly, unlike abortion, Scully claims that there are no “hard cases in factory farming to blur the issue (most likely referencing cases of rape or incest that motivate an abortion). He thinks that this should make it even more clear that given that there are “an [abundance] of alternatives”, there ought not to be any “claim of necessity” (Scully).

- a. Do you think Scully is correct in his conclusion?

Section 2: The Catholic Church

In this section, I will be discussing the important background information of creation and the differences between humans and animals.

Hierarchy of Being

A crucial common mention from the priests was the ordering of creation. It was mentioned repeatedly that humans were above animals. It is thus crucial that we understand this ordering of creation in order to understand the fundamental framework which the priests and the Catholic Church is operating out of. This framework is what is known as the Hierarchy of Being.

Aristotle viewed the universe as “eternal” and made of “distinct forms of being.”⁸ He put the lifeless forms such as rocks at the bottom and those with souls further up according to the “hierarchy of souls.”⁸ Soul was defined as “the inner organic principle animating a being such that it is alive.”⁸ Each level up a soul had an additional “specific power”⁸ that the level below did not.⁸ For plant life, their soul had the ability to grow and produce. Animal life had the additional power of “sense, movement, and memory”⁸ – the “sensible soul.”⁸ Human life had the additional power of “rationality” – the “rational soul.”⁸ Above this was the “Prime mover” – what theists such as Christians refer to as God.⁸

In Catholicism, God is more than the Prime mover or the Supreme Being. He is Being itself (He IS)*, is outside of creation, and sustains all that is in being as mentioned by Priest D. The Catholic Hierarchy of Being was also mentioned explicitly by Priest B and referenced indirectly by all other priests interviewed. I will now reference this hierarchy as the Order of Creation due to Catholic view that God created all being and therefore everything, but God, is created as He is the creator².

*CCC 213:..."I AM WHO AM" contains then the truth that God alone IS...God is the fullness of Being and of every perfection, without origin and without end.²

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states²:

325 The Apostles' Creed professes that God is "creator of heaven and earth". The Nicene Creed makes it explicit that this profession includes "all that is, seen and unseen".

326 The Scriptural expression "heaven and earth" means all that exists, creation in its entirety. It also indicates the bond, deep within creation, that both unites heaven and earth and distinguishes the one from the other: "the earth" is the world of men, while "heaven" or "the heavens" can designate both the firmament and God's own "place" - "our Father in heaven" and consequently the "heaven" too which is eschatological glory. Finally, "heaven" refers to the saints and the "place" of the spiritual creatures, the angels, who surround God.

338 *Nothing exists that does not owe its existence to God the Creator.* The world began when God's word drew it out of nothingness; all existent beings, all of nature, and all human history are rooted in this primordial event, the very genesis by which the world was constituted and time begun.

Priest D also stated that "animals are in a completely different category". The Order of Creation is explained by Priest B and is as follows (following highest to lowest):

- 1) Angels** – who are both spiritual and rational creatures
- 2) 2) Composite/Human – who are rational creatures
- 3) 3) Animals
- 4) 4) Vegetative – Plants
- 5) 5) Inanimate matter – such as a rock

**For more information on Angels see Catechism of the Catholic Church: Part 1 Section 2 Chapter 1 Article 1 Paragraph 5 I. The Angels 328-336

Priest C confirms this in saying that “Human beings are above animals on the grounds of our “superior sentience and souls” (will touch on souls later). Priest G also mentions that humans “are at a superior consciousness than animals.” Along with this, the Catechism of the Catholic Church states²:

342 The hierarchy of creatures is expressed by the order of the "six days", from the less perfect to the more perfect. God loves all his creatures²⁰⁹ and takes care of each one, even the sparrow. Nevertheless, Jesus said: "You are of more value than many sparrows", or again: "Of how much more value is a man than a sheep!"

343 Man is the summit of the Creator's work, as the inspired account expresses by clearly distinguishing the creation of man from that of the other creatures.

1703 Endowed with "a spiritual and immortal" soul,⁵ the human person is "the only creature on earth that God has willed for its own sake."⁶ From his conception, he is destined for eternal beatitude***.

Here we see the Catholic Church’s official teaching is that humans are created as higher beings of creation than animals and with a particular intention and importance that animals are not. Also, in Scripture**** we can reference:

Matthew 6:26¹³

²⁶Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?

***Catechism of the Catholic Church #1721: God put us in the world to know, to love, and to serve him, and so to come to paradise. Beatitude makes us "partakers of the divine nature" and of eternal life. With beatitude, man enters into the glory of Christ and into the joy of the Trinitarian life. For more information on beatitude, start with the Catechism of the Catholic Church Part 3 Section 1 Chapter 1 Article 2: Our Vocation to Beatitude

****Christian biblical text

Matthew 10: 29-31¹³

²⁹Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And *yet* not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows.

Luke 12:24¹³

²⁴Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap; they have no storeroom nor barn, and *yet* God feeds them; how much more valuable you are than the birds!

In Scripture, from Jesus Christ himself, we see clearly that humans are placed above animals in the Order of Creation. In addition to this, all priests had things to say on the Order of Creation as well. It is important to note that the presence of a hierarchy is not inherently discriminatory. What is done with the hierarchy is what determines discrimination rather than the ranking itself. Importantly, the Order of Creation actually demands that Catholics maintain the fullness of creation at each level and not allow the elevation or lowering of creation via words, ideas, actions, etc.

Will

Priest D stated that “animals cannot freely choose to love”. Finding its roots in St. Thomas Aquinas, love is defined in the Catechism²:

1704 The human person participates in the light and power of the divine Spirit. By his reason, he is capable of understanding the order of things established by the Creator. By free will, he is capable of directing himself toward his true good. He finds his perfection "in seeking and loving what is true and good."⁷

1766 "To love is to will the good of another."⁴¹ All other affections have their source in this first movement of the human heart toward the good. Only the good can be loved.⁴² Passions "are evil if love is evil and good if it is good."⁴³

We see here a crucial term: “will”². Will, as defined by the Catholic Encyclopedia, is the “faculty of choice; it is classified among the appetites*, and is contrasted with those which belong either to the merely sensitive or to the vegetative order: it is thus commonly designated ‘the rational appetite.’ ”⁹ So, the combination of choice/will and reasoning is an element of which distinguishes humans from animals in the Order of Creation.

*St. Thomas Aquinas: Appetite includes all forms of internal inclination. (Summa Theol., I-II, Q. viii, a. 1; Quæst. disputatæ, De veritate, Q. xxii, a. 1). It is found in all beings, even in those that are unconscious.⁹

Soul

Another differentiating factor of humans is the immortal soul. Human beings have both a body and an immortal soul. Dr. Richard Geraghty, PhD, former professor of philosophy at St. John's Seminary in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles*, has this to say on the matter:

“One principle is that all living things have a soul. Here soul is defined as what makes an organic body live. Now when any living thing dies, its soul is separated from its body. In the case of plants and animals the soul goes out of existence. But in the case of man, the soul remains in existence because it is a spiritual or immaterial thing.”⁷

The Catechism of the Catholic Church further elaborates on the human soul²:

362 The human person, created in the image of God, is a being at once corporeal and spiritual. The biblical account expresses this reality in symbolic language when it affirms that “then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.”²²⁹ Man, whole and entire, is therefore *willed* by God.

363 In Sacred Scripture the term “soul” often refers to human *life* or the entire human *person*.²³⁰ But “soul” also refers to the innermost aspect of man, that which is of greatest value in him,²³¹ that by which he is most especially in God's image: “soul” signifies the *spiritual principle* in man.

*He also taught the Friars of the Franciscan Missionaries of the Eternal Word

364 The human body shares in the dignity of "the image of God": it is a human body precisely because it is animated by a spiritual soul, and it is the whole human person that is intended to become, in the body of Christ, a temple of the Spirit.²³²

Man, though made of body and soul, is a unity. Through his very bodily condition he sums up in himself the elements of the material world. Through him they are thus brought to their highest perfection and can raise their voice in praise freely given to the Creator. For this reason, man may not despise his bodily life. Rather he is obliged to regard his body as good and to hold it in honor since God has created it and will raise it up on the last day.²³³

365 The unity of soul and body is so profound that one has to consider the soul to be the "form" of the body:²³⁴ i.e., it is because of its spiritual soul that the body made of matter becomes a living, human body; spirit and matter, in man, are not two natures united, but rather their union forms a single nature.

366 The Church teaches that every spiritual soul is created immediately by God - it is not "produced" by the parents - and also that it is immortal: it does not perish when it separates from the body at death, and it will be reunited with the body at the final Resurrection.²³⁵

367 Sometimes the soul is distinguished from the spirit: St. Paul for instance prays that God may sanctify his people "wholly", with "spirit and soul and body" kept sound and blameless at the Lord's coming.²³⁶ The Church teaches that this distinction does not introduce a duality into the soul.²³⁷ "Spirit" signifies that from creation man is ordered to a supernatural end and that his soul can gratuitously be raised beyond all it deserves to communion with God.²³⁸

We can then see that while animals and humans both do have souls created by God, human souls are immortal, are what make us most like God, and will be reunited to our new bodies in heaven whereas animal souls will cease to exist upon death along with the death of their bodies. This is an important distinction in determining another "additional specific power"⁸ (a rational and immortal soul), to put it into Aristotelian terms, that warrants humans a place in the Order of Creation above that of animals. More so,

Thomas Aquinas says in his Summa Theologica, “The rational soul can be made only by creation...For it has been proved that the rational soul cannot be produced except by creation. Now, God alone can create; for the first agent alone can act without presupposing the existence of anything.”¹ Here Thomas is stating that the rational soul can only be created by God. Therefore, there is an implied intentionality of this rational soul to exist within a human specifically. What this does, is help us to see that this differentiation of the animals and humans is intentional and more so clarifies the justification of the Order of Creation.

Created in His Image

During the interviews, the priests made the important claim that humans are made in the image of God. The phrase, “image of God” means much more than our physical appearance. Priest D stated, “Humans are distinct because they are created in God’s image & likeness – we are relational beings w/ love at our core. Humans are at a higher order or existence – they are closer to God and able to fully imitate God & experience Him.” Priest E stated, “Humans are made in the likeness of God. God made us to share in the divinity* – a relationship between humans and God”. The Catechism² goes into this as well:

* “Share in the divinity” – Catechism of the Catholic Church Part 1 Section 2 Chapter 2 Article 3 Paragraph 1 460.

Also, for further explanation listen to Pints with Aquinas Podcast: Episode 137

357 Being in the image of God the human individual possesses the dignity of a person, who is not just something, but someone. He is capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving himself and entering into communion with other persons. And he is called by grace to a covenant with his Creator, to offer him a response of faith and love that no other creature can give in his stead.

705 By virtue of his soul and his spiritual powers of intellect and will, man is endowed with freedom, an "outstanding manifestation of the divine image."

1704 The human person participates in the light and power of the divine Spirit. By his reason, he is capable of understanding the order of things established by the Creator. By free will, he is capable of directing himself toward his true good. He finds his perfection "in seeking and loving what is true and good."⁷

1706 By his reason, man recognizes the voice of God which urges him "to do what is good and avoid what is evil."⁹ Everyone is obliged to follow this law, which makes itself heard in conscience and is fulfilled in the love of God and of neighbor. Living a moral life bears witness to the dignity of the person.

Here we see that humans are like God in that they are both spiritual and physical beings (the common ground being the spiritual nature – see CCC 365² in “Soul” section above), have an intellect and will, possesses reason, and are given freedom². As mentioned above, the soul of the human is immortal similar to God’s nature as He is eternal. The key difference, of course, is that God is uncreated and does not require anything outside of Himself to sustain His being.

Animals are creatures who do not possess the qualities above. Animals are subject to their instincts, do not have an eternal soul as discussed previously, and do not have an intellect to the capacity that humans do as a species. In addition, importantly the inherent “dignity of a person”² via “being in the image of God”² sets humans apart referencing back to the Order of Creation – humans are fundamentally in a different and higher category. Humans also inherently have a *capacity* of various abilities that animals do not

have. For example, an animal does not have the capacity to create a beautiful, complex painting whereas a human does. (To address cases such as a painting elephant, this points more to a motor capability created by training. The difference is the mind behind the painting. A human has a creativity and rational that the elephant does not possess that results in the beauty and complexity of the painting. The painting by the elephant can thus be viewed as a more of a novelty rather than a product of original thought and creativity.) Likewise, when you kill a human you destroy the greater *potential* than if you were to kill the animal. It is important to note that there can be something blocking the realization of the potential of a particular human such as the coma patient or the painter with lack of skills to replicate the level Picasso's works. The capacity is what is of importance in distinguishing the human from animals.

Section 3: Animals in Particular

In this section, I will be discussing animals specifically as they pertain to Catholicism.

What value do animals have?

All priests confirmed that animals, and all of creation for that matter, are good and have value. In Scripture, in Genesis chapter 1, during story of creation we repeatedly see the phrase “God saw that it was good” after each of His creations. Priest D stated, “Animals are good, they give Him glory. They have intrinsic value because they are created by God.” Priest H stated, “Genesis 1&2: All creation, in its entirety, has value. Animals deserve our care and respect.” Priest G stated, “Animals are part of creation. They are therefore from God and sacred. They do have intrinsic value.” Priest C stated, “Animals are valued as part of God’s creation and therefore have intrinsic value. The Catechism goes on to say²:

339 *Each creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection.* For each one of the works of the "six days" it is said: "And God saw that it was good." "By the very nature of creation, material being is endowed with its own stability, truth and excellence, its own order and laws."²⁰⁸ Each of the various creatures, willed in its own being, reflects in its own way a ray of God's infinite wisdom and goodness. Man must therefore respect the particular goodness of every creature, to avoid any disordered use of things which would be in contempt of the Creator and would bring disastrous consequences for human beings and their environment.

It is clear, that Catholic teaching values animals as having inherent value and are good as they created by God. Inherent value, here, is to be understood not as value produced by the creation itself, but sourced from its creator. Animals have value and are good in of themselves *because* they are God’s creation. Also, note that God “*wills*” the being of animals as it “reflects in its own way a ray of God’s infinite wisdom and goodness.” Notice, however, that the Catechism echoes the Order of Creation in saying “Each creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection.” We can understand this

by meaning that as you go up the Order of Creation, the more of “God’s infinite wisdom and goodness” is able to be seen via “[reflection]” of the qualities (mentioned in the *Hierarchy of Being* section) of each particular creation. It is important to understand that while all creation is good, this does not mean that it is equal. Therefore, there is an increasing level of duties and concern owed to each level of creation here on earth. Priest A puts this goodness into context of the Order of Creation by stating, “Humans were the focus. Animals and nature can be viewed as the assets.” Priest B goes further by explaining that “the purpose of all other creation is for human flourishing. Creation aids in full communion with God and helps to reveal God.” So, essentially, animals are valued and good as they are creations of God, but their purpose is more aimed at humans rather than the animals themselves.

What is allowed?

Priest A comments that, on a practical level, “animals are valuable to us as a resource for food.” We can reference this claim in the Catechism²:

2417 God entrusted animals to the stewardship of those whom he created in his own image.¹⁹⁸ Hence it is legitimate to use animals for food and clothing. They may be domesticated to help man in his work and leisure. Medical and scientific experimentation on animals is a morally acceptable practice if it remains within reasonable limits and contributes to caring for or saving human lives.

As a basis, we can see that the use of animals is permitted in the contexts of “food and clothing”², “work and leisure”², and “medical & scientific experimentation.”² Priest B confirms this in saying, “We do not have a moral obligation to eat meat or not to eat

meat.” Now, of course, the use of animals can become sinful as demonstrated by the qualification of medical & scientific use: “if it remains within reasonable limits and contributes to caring for or saving human lives.”² Here we can see that while something may be permitted, this does not mean that humans can simply do anything we want. We will go more into this later.

Priest G stated that “no misuse is permitted.” Priest A stated, “We are not to mistreat/abuse animals. Priest D stated, “Any mistreatment/abuse is morally wrong ultimately because it dishonors God. We are called to care in all contexts.” Priest G stated, “The mistreatment of anything is wrong.” Priest C stated, “The mistreatment of animals is wrong in every context.” This principle is also echoed in the Catechism²:

2456 The dominion granted by the Creator over the mineral, vegetable, and animal resources of the universe cannot be separated from respect for moral obligations, including those toward generations to come.

Clearly, all priests agree that mistreatment/abuse is not allowed in Catholicism. So, it seems to see how this plays out is to see what qualifies as mistreatment. Priest G stated, “Mistreatment can be displayed by 1) Not allowing dignity as animals 2) Substituting animals for human beings Ex] Grieving more over a dog than a human.” Priest G would thus not agree with any action that did not allow the dignity of an animal to be present. He then references back to the Order of Creation in stating that you would also be mistreating the animal by placing it above a human in any way. He also mentions that we are not to “torture or inflict needless pain.” We can imagine scenarios where pain may be required such as 1) Getting a biting dog off of a child. 2) Getting out the head of an animal stuck in a fence. 3) Giving an animal medication via a needle. Notice, the first abides by the Order of Creation and as such we can imagine many similar scenarios

where the same thought process would apply as well. The other examples point out scenarios where pain is a necessary byproduct for the good of the animal. Priest H confirms this thought in saying that “intention matters”. So, we can easily rule out actions of authentic altruism towards animals that involve pain so long as they do not put animals above humans and, of course, any outright accidents where an animal is harmed or killed. These scenarios would not be considered sinful or morally wrong.

Previously, I mentioned that the purpose of animals is aimed more towards humans. To support this, the Catechism states²:

2457 Animals are entrusted to man's stewardship; he must show them kindness. They may be used to serve the just satisfaction of man's needs.

Here we can see that animals can be used for man’s purposes (which includes CCC 2417 above¹) & satisfaction. However, it must be just. Priest G would agree that this means that any act that “does not allow the dignity of [the] animal” would then not qualify as just. Also, they must not conflict with our “moral obligations”¹ to an animal. Thus, these acts and practices must then be addressed, but also within the Order of Creation. Stewardship, kindness, and need (which can warrant a “just satisfaction”²) are addressed in the following sections.

CCC #2416

While I was aware that it was allowed in the Catholic Church to eat animals, I also felt as if there needed to be qualifications for this. Some of these I addressed above. In particular, CCC #2416 & #2418 involved crucial language and qualifications. In this section, I will address CCC #2416¹:

2416 *Animals* are God's creatures. He surrounds them with his providential care. By their mere existence they bless him and give him glory.¹⁹⁷ Thus men owe them kindness. We should recall the gentleness with which saints like St. Francis of Assisi or St. Philip Neri treated animals.

This excerpt confirms animals as God's creation and as being cared for by the Father as seen in Matthew 6:26¹³, Matthew 10: 29-31¹³, and Luke 12:24¹³. We also see the phrase, "they bless him and give him glory"² as stated also by Priest D. What seems to be of the utmost importance is the term "kindness". Once we define what this kindness means, then we can see what is in fact "[owed]". Priest A stated "Kindness means to respect, universally, the natural environment as something God gave us. Kindness looks different depending on the animal.". Priest A used the example of a "cat versus a lion" to display more of a practical point – Priest G also made this point. Priest B simply says "Kindness means not to be cruel" and that kindness "is universal. There is no reason to exclude cows, chickens, pigs" from kindness. Priest H also stated that "kindness is universal".

Priest D defines kindness as a "care and concern for creation. Creation is not meant to be just utilized, manipulated, or sucked dry for lack of a better term. It is easy for us to become disconnected from the creation of God in the modern world. St. Francis and St. Philip were connected to creation which resulted in their kindness to creation. Kindness

should be universal. While some animals are more typically consumed, they do not lack the same dignity as those that are not including those seen as pets. One is not any less the creation of God than the other.” He did go on to say that “not every cow is going to be treated as a pet, those relationships aren’t there.” So, it does seem that the companionship relationship does play a role in how kindness plays out. Priest D is not “too aware” of the conditions in the factory farm and was therefore “hesitant to say” if there was kindness being shown in factory farms. However, on the little he did know he did say, “it doesn’t seem to me that they are not being shown kindness.” However, he also said that “there is a need for meat as a food source. It may be rapid and unkind, but they have to get it somehow. The volume demanded may require this roughness at times.” It is very important to understand that Priest D is more familiar to ranches and not factory farms. During this topic, it seemed that he was referencing these kinds of conditions rather than factory farms which, again, he is not familiar with. This is very apparent in his use of the words “at times” because the conditions of the factory farms are fairly constant for animals.

Priest G stated that kindness means to “care” for animals. “We are to treat them with dignity according to the scale of creation. Distinctions are motivated by culture preferences & traditions, but have no grounds.” He agrees that kindness ought to be universal as well. He also stated that the Church “would not look kindly on the current food system.” (more on that later).

Priest C stated that kindness, in the context of animals particularly in the food system, is to “treat them gently, minimize pain involved, and tend to basic their basic needs.” Priest H also stated that “kindness is universal”.

CCC #2418

The other excerpt that seemed to require a clearer definition was CCC #2418²:

2418 It is contrary to human dignity to cause animals to suffer or die needlessly. It is likewise unworthy to spend money on them that should as a priority go to the relief of human misery. One can love animals; one should not direct to them the affection due only to persons.

The phrase “contrary to human dignity”² will be discussed below. The 2nd and 3rd sentences also clearly teaches that humans are to be given priority over animals. What was of importance to me was defining what “needlessly” meant – how strict ought this to be interpreted? If held very strictly, one could say that most humans in America could live off of non-animal products and therefore not many animals needed to suffer or die.

Here is what the priests had to say:

Priest D stated, “There is a need for sufficient sustenance. We should only kill an animal if they are a threat to lives or if they are to be consumed. Hunting should be done with respect.” Notice, Priest D used the word “sufficient” in qualifying the need of animals for food. Thus, if it were true that there was more than a sufficient amount, this would then qualify as outside the boundaries of need by Priest D’s standards. When asked, if America’s meat consumption was excessive, Priest D chose to skip this question on the grounds of the multiple factors that he would need knowledge of to determine that decisively.

Priest H stated, “‘Need’ should be interpreted seriously. We also should take a broader view and consider the ethics methods being used and how they affect internally and externally (regarding the factory farm). The impact on ecology is not currently a

concern in our minds.” Priest H wants us to seriously ask: “Do we actually need this?” In this he is regarding the excess of food as well as the long-term effects that will “impact future generations”. Priest H is asking if the abundance of food, particularly animal products, is really needed considering the effects it has on the environment that will impact future generations as well as the ethically questionable practices. He asked this in such a way that communicated that he thinks the food system situation, practically & ethically, is past what is needed, but he did say that he needed more information as well to take a concrete stance. This concern would be in line with the Catechism²:

2415 The seventh commandment enjoins respect for the integrity of creation. Animals, like plants and inanimate beings, are by nature destined for the common good of past, present, and future humanity.¹⁹⁵ Use of the mineral, vegetable, and animal resources of the universe cannot be divorced from respect for moral imperatives. Man's dominion over inanimate and other living beings granted by the Creator is not absolute; it is limited by concern for the quality of life of his neighbor, including generations to come; it requires a religious respect for the integrity of creation.¹⁹⁶

In the last sentence, we see that concern for humanity goes past the current generation, but also “includes generations to come.”. Therefore, a more serious look and reaction to the food system would be warranted. However, this does not follow that it is to be given higher priority over current, more pressing human issues, but only that the priority of the food system may be heightened more than it is at this present time.

Priest B stated, “[First off], animals are not people. We have a responsibility to use animals well. They are necessary for human flourishing.” Priest E also supports this idea in saying, “We should seek husbandry and seek the best version we can get with an animal.” In this, Priest B is concerned mainly about the “feasibility of adequate nutrition without animals. It can be very expensive and also impractical for certain individuals to

drive say three hours to a Whole Foods. Also, the level of effort needed to eat a vegan-diet well may step outside of what is morally obligated.” This is an understandable and respectable concern. For all of human history, humans have consumed varying amounts of animals and has been a staple of our diet. Also, as a priest his position is to care for people in various ways. It only makes sense that he would hesitate to say that it would be feasible given that a vegan-diet has only recently been popularized and long-term observance of individuals with vegan-diets has been limited. The “flourishing” Priest B mentions does include “nutritional sustenance, long-term sustainability, general health but also includes references of beauty and the natural order of creation.”

Priest G questions if “there is ever a need for suffering directly. It is cruelty when it is unkind and is then needlessly being done”. Priest C stated, “We have a duty to not commit undue suffering because animals are God’s creation. We should avoid anything that is avoidable. Even areas such as medical research and where human lives are in danger, we should minimize pain and suffering. There is no permission to treat animals as morally neutral objects.”

From here, I asked if our meat consumption was, indeed, excessive. Priest A stated “With an increase in wealth, there is an increase in everything. We currently consume more than we have to.” – stating this in a more general manner. Priest H stated, “Our consumption of meat can be excessive. There should be a more efficient food system – one that can feed enough people with the resources.” Priest B stated, “Yes, it is excessive. We should have a more efficient food system, but not necessarily vegan – a better, more balanced version of the current one (referencing food choices in production).”

It seems that all priests do, in fact, question if we actually do need the food system that we do now. That being said, all priests did not specify if this meant a different food system with different main foods or just an improved, more efficient system where less pain, suffering, and wastefulness is involved. I would feel safe in saying that the all priests would at least be satisfied with the latter.

Contrary to Human Dignity

Priest A stated, “When it is abuse, we hurt ourselves. This can also take the form of our health in treating that animals in factory farms poorly.” Priest G says, “How can I be a saint on one level & a demon on another? This is indicative of the general approach of a human. A person is a whole. Therefore, an action in one area is indicative of another. It speaks to who we are. It is therefore contrary to human dignity to be cruel to animals.” Priest G is making a few points here: 1) There is an inconsistency of the person. 2) If there is behavior that points to contradictory behavior, there must be contradictory stances/values at work in them. “There’s something wrong someplace.” 3) If/when we are cruel to animals, it goes against our dignity as humans as ones made for love, in the image of God, and as stewards of creation. The third point demonstrates that cruelty towards animals is against the role we are to play in relation to creation – as ones that care for creation. The second point is something much deeper. If as humans we are able to be cruel to in one aspect, but kind in another this points to possibly a “disingenuous kindness” which then points to the character of the person that is flawed. Relatedly, perhaps the person is unable to transfer the values held to other areas of their life which,

again, reveals an unjust discrimination of some kind. Also, cruelty can also work the other way and damage the person further: “A person is a whole.”

A Lost Gratitude

While perhaps this is not directly related, I do find that it is worth mentioning that a concern of some priests was about the loss of gratitude for food in general. Priest A stated, “There is especially a loss of appreciation of meals. In biblical times, meals were a time of celebration, a time of communal importance. There was great appreciation of food.” Priest D stated, “There is good in enjoying a meal.” In a time where food can be picked up easily, is frequently eaten mindlessly, and is even be viewed as an obstacle to productivity, food has become more and more something to be bought more than something to be enjoyed. Also, food is starting to be eaten more and more alone and while doing other activities rather than being eaten with company with the meal being something to be gathered around. Essentially, what is lost is a sharing in life featured around one of necessities and enjoyments of life – the meal. This shift in culture is certainly one that the priests would find regrettable and one that they would definitely like to see return. At the very least, a mindfulness and increased gratitude of the food being eaten is something that the priests think ought to return. More so, food ought to point Catholics toward a greater gratitude towards God for the food He ultimately supplies. Priest C also bring up a good point in saying, “Excess is not always bad (bad if gluttony of course) – occasionally we feast. This is good in that we: 1) Enjoy God’s creation 2) Feel fully alive 3) Satisfy something deep within us - including on a spiritual level.” Priest C observes that feasts are usually communal and that there is usually more

gratitude involved than on a regular basis –especially when that gratitude is aimed at God.

Interconnectedness

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states²:

340 God wills the *interdependence of creatures*. The sun and the moon, the cedar and the little flower, the eagle and the sparrow: the spectacle of their countless diversities and inequalities tells us that no creature is self-sufficient. Creatures exist only in dependence on each other, to complete each other, in the service of each other.

To start, one must understand that the term “creatures”² also pertains to humans. It then follows that humans are also interdependent on other creatures as well. This plays out in what creatures all consume for food and more broadly the operations of the ecosystem as a whole (going as far out as to the planetary ecosystem). Priest H had some very interesting things to say about this. Priest H says, “The delusion is that our faith is entirely private. Everything is interrelated. We are all in the same boat – we all live on the same planet. The food system also affects [humans] – we are also being cruel to ourselves. If we hurt the environment, it hurts [the animals] & us. We should not [simply] lift one over the other.” In this last sentence what Priest H means is to yes, recognize the Order of Creation, but not lord over animals outright and do whatever we want. We must also consider the consequences that affect humans and the world ecologically. Priest H also mentions that we have something to learn from Buddhists: “Being is Interbeing.” This is the view that all things exist in another to some capacity. Priest H used this example: “To see a piece of paper more than a piece of paper, but as trees, water, the

animals around, etc.” Priest H is NOT adopting this view in the slightest, but is rather suggesting that a vantage-point closer to “interbeing” is beneficial to see interconnections of creation. Essentially, he is advocating for an increased awareness of exactly how interconnected all of creation really is. Again, Priest H absolutely holds that we ought to rightly operate within the Order of Creation, but also to not lose sight of how “[interdependent]”² creation really is and the consequences of human action have toward the rest of creation and in turn, us.

Simplicity

Priest H “This planet has enough for all that we need, but not enough for what we want.” Priest E, “If we lived out a Gospel Simplicity, lots of concerns, including the topic of this thesis, would go away.” By that he means, that the food system is only a concern right now because of our high demand for food. This is a simple, yet challenging solution proposed by Priest E. All priests agree that consumerism is absolutely part of American culture and that it is a “bad” part of our culture. Priest C even said that “[consumerism] is a sickness” and Priest H said that “we have a ‘disposable’ mentality” because of it. I think Priest B put it best when he said “We are not simply meant to consume”. Priest D then offers the vehicle to achieving Priest E’s proposal: “We should move our focus from materials goods to things of heaven.” Priest E explains this more understandably: “There is a single-mindedness and a negative attitude of valuing the materials for the sake of themselves”. The actual ramifications of the entire U.S people spending less and living more simply are hard to imagine. Some would even argue that it may disrupt the economy and cash flow. How this is carried out is certainly important, however, the

priests are more concerned for the person primarily and how their priorities are aligned. Though, I think many of us can agree with the priests that the materialism involved in consumerism contains fundamental problems that ultimately lead to dissatisfaction. So, perhaps this does not solve all of the problems, but the priests tend to think that at least our priorities will be in line and that the person will be more satisfied in that they are moving toward the Creator rather than the creations.

Section 4: Dominion – What does that look like?

In this section, I will be discussing what is meant by dominion over animals and how that is meant to look like in Catholicism.

Dominion & Stewardship

When addressing being able to eat animals we must first find the source of this permission. This permission can be found in Scripture:

Genesis 1:26¹³

26Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

Genesis 2:18-20¹³

18Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him." **19**Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought *them* to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. **20**The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him.

Genesis 9:3¹³

3Every shall be food for you; I give all to you, as I gave the green plant.

Priest E states "Humans have dominion over creation. The power to name creation speaks to an authority over." In Catholicism it is true that humans do have dominion, or authority, over creation. So, dominion is the authority humans have over animals and the permission to eat animals is contained within this dominion. However, this does not mean a total authority as confirmed by the Catechism of the Catholic Church²:

2456 The dominion granted by the Creator over the mineral, vegetable, and animal resources of the universe cannot be separated from respect for moral obligations, including those toward generations to come.

2415 The seventh commandment enjoins respect for the integrity of creation. Animals, like plants and inanimate beings, are by nature destined for the common good of past, present, and future humanity.¹⁹⁵ Use of the mineral, vegetable, and animal resources of the universe cannot be divorced from respect for moral imperatives. Man's dominion over inanimate and other living beings granted by the Creator is not absolute; it is limited by concern for the quality of life of his neighbor, including generations to come; it requires a religious respect for the integrity of creation.¹⁹⁶

As we can see, it is explicitly stated that “Man’s dominion...granted by the Creator is not absolute”². Additionally, Pope Francis has this to say:

“An inadequate presentation of Christian anthropology gave rise to a wrong understanding of the relationship between human beings in the world. Often what was handed on was a Promethean vision of mastery over the world...Instead, our ‘dominion’ over the universe should be understood more properly in the sense of responsible stewardship.”⁵

“Clearly the Bible has no place for a tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures.”⁵

In response to this quote by Pope Francis in his letter on the Environment, the Priests had this to say:

- Priest A: “If for food, you can use it. Stewardship goes along with this though – we are responsible for them and should take care of them. Uniqueness of humans does not mean an authority to mistreat. Level of “respect” is not the same as owed to humans.”
- Priest D: “Dominion over animals gives us authority. Stewardship involves animals being viewed as a gift from God and that how we use them matters. We must also be responsible of how we use resources. We must cherish, and be grateful.”
- Priest H: “The delusion is that Humans are the dominator. Stewardship is a humbler view. Dominion points out our role. Stewardship explains how that role ought to be carried out. We need to reevaluate the entire system and the ethics behind them.”
- Priest B: “Mastery is imposing my will in an authoritative fashion. Dominion involves not making it less than it is. Stewardship can follow this principle: Take the power given to us by God & make it reflect God’s goodness.”
- Priest G: “There is a hierarchy, we are not as comfortable with this view. In cosmic, familial terms: The kingdom of God is not built on one another. It is more of a community – a family (but there is a hierarchy of being/role). We are called to responsible stewardship.”

- Priest C: “Stewardship displays that the Earth is *entrusted* to us. There is no permission to treat animals as morally neutral objects. In Genesis we see that God creates a covenant with Noah and all in the ark, however, not everyone is on the same playing field.” (“Playing field” is referring to the Order of Creation).

All priests acknowledge the God-given dominion, but also agree that mastery is not the approach we ought to be taking. Stewardship involves being responsible with our resources, a care and cherish for creation, and acting according to moral principles. In my opinion, a stewardship for creation can absolutely increase in effort. I also think that this can also be done alongside the human efforts as well at the individual level.

Animal Rights

While the following could have been deduced, during the interview, Priest C explicitly stated that “animals [do not] have rights. Rather, humans have duties towards animals.” It is then to be understood that the Catholic teaching is operating out of a direct duties framework where the duty is in fact towards the animal itself due to the inherent value it has as part of God’s creation. So, when you kick a dog, for example, you are in fact doing wrong toward the dog itself. This is precisely because the dog has inherent value whose source of value is the ultimate creator of the dog – God. When Priest C says that animals do not have rights, he is not saying that we should abandon all laws regarding animals. Remember we are still to be stewards and care for them, and laws are

absolutely necessary to ensure this care. What is meant is that in the way we talk about human rights as being inherent or God-given, the same does not hold for animals. This is due to what was discussed earlier: That animals are ultimately made for “human flourishing” and that “the human person is ‘the only creature on earth that God has willed for its own sake.’”² It is precisely that humans are “willed for [their] own sake” that humans have rights. Animals are “entrusted”² to us and are made for the sake of another and therefore are afforded duties rather than rights.

Speciesism

Peter Singer, an Australian moral philosopher, defines speciesism as “a prejudice or attitude bias in favor of one’s own species and against those of members of other species.”¹⁵ In layman terms, it is the equivalent of racism and sexism as it pertains from species to species. Singer observes* that “the capacity to suffer [is] the vital characteristic that gives a being the right to equal consideration.”¹⁵ Furthermore, it is the “capacity for suffer and enjoyment is a prerequisite for having interests at all.”¹⁵ Singer points out that these capacities are shared among animals and human beings alike. Therefore, Singer thinks, we ought to equally consider the interests of animals as we consider our own. Singer considers “most human beings [as] speciesists”¹⁵ in that “speciesists allow the interest of their own species to override the greater interests of members of other species.”¹⁵ Singer argues that “if a being suffers, there can be no moral justification for

*Read *Animal Liberation: Ch 1 All Animals Are Equal* for full explanation & demonstration of Singer’s viewpoint

refusing to take that suffering into account”¹⁵ and that “there are no good reasons, scientific or philosophical, for denying that animals feel pain.”¹⁵ Singer claims that if we were to give an animal the same amount of pain as we give to a baby (in equal proportion) “for no good reason then we must, unless we are speciesists, consider it equally wrong.”¹⁵

From a Catholic perspective, there is not a prejudice present nor are humans against animals. By this I mean, in Catholicism there is not a prejudice present nor is Catholicism against animals. In fact, as seen above, Catholicism holds animals in high regard as God’s creations. Also, Catholics are called to be stewards and care for creation. (Now, Singer would most certainly argue that humans are doing a terrible job at this and I would not disagree - particularly when it comes to factory farms. Most likely, Singer and the Catholic Church would be able to find cases/areas where human priorities are taking too much priority where we are in fact hurting the earth and all of its inhabitants.) The fact is that from a Catholic perspective, the general prioritization of human needs is justified and just. Our most important reference is the Order of Creation. While animals and humans have the capacity for suffering and enjoyment in common, the Order of Creation tells us the categories of whose interests take priority. So, while those that adopt the speciesists approach and Catholics may converge in the action taken, the ideas and approach of speciesism would not be adopted by Catholicism. Now, as discussed in the *Dominion & Stewardship* section, this does not mean, whatsoever, that humans then have the right to disregard the “most important interests of members of other species in order to promote the most trivial of our own species.”¹⁵ What is required is a thorough examination of the human and animals’ interests. Then one must figure out if the

animal's interests are of sufficient importance to outweigh human interests. We must also keep in the role of animals which is, as Priest B stated, "for human flourishing". What is then required is an honest assessment of what course of action will most aid in human flourishing. Also, keep in mind that human flourishing is not limited to sustenance or worldly progress, but also that of spiritual flourishing as it pertains to the Christian God. Therefore, actions in favor of animals are entirely possible and are also therefore in favor of human flourishing as well.

Section 5: Factory Farms

In this section, I will be discussing factory farms and the effects it has on animals and the environment. Factory farms present problems for “public health, the environment, animal welfare, and impacts on rural communities.”²

Animal Welfare

When asked about the welfare in animal factory farms the priests had this to say:

- Pries A stated, “God did not choose for it to be as it is right now (referencing treatment of animals in food system).”
- Priest G stated, “The Church would not look kindly on the current food system. The pain involved is forced feeding, and caged animals (or more like imprisoned). Modern times allow us other options of food. We can also come up with more acceptable methods for food production – which is of course subject to variation based on the animal. We must choose less pain. This lack of kindness is rooted in prioritization of efficiency which is poisoned from the beginning”.
- Priest C stated, “It is clear that the food system treats animals shamefully. Animals should be farmed in a way that minimizes pain Individuals can then respond and choose to abstain from meat/animal products, but are not obligated to – some people simply don’t have the option.”
- Priest E “[does] not see an issue with the [animal factory farms]” in regards to welfare. We are meant to use, but not torture.”
- Priest B stated, “The industrial commercialization of animals is over the line or how we do it is over the line – it is misusing the animals. There does seem to be something immoral in that, but not to the extent that we as a culture need to stop eating meat. There *is* misuse/mistreatment involved in the conditions in the factories. We ought to reduce our meat

consumption. Animals ought to live according to their nature, God's blueprint for them."

- Priest H "A 'turning of the head' to what is going on in the factory farms is a sin."
- Priest D is not "too aware" of the conditions in the factory farm and was therefore "hesitant to say" if there was kindness being shown in factory farms. However, on the little he did know he did say, "it doesn't seem to me that they are not being shown kindness." However, he also said that "there is a need for meat as a food source. It may be rapid and unkind, but they have to get it somehow. The volume demanded may require this roughness at times. There may be venial sin involved in the meat production/consumption we normally see. There is a chance of mortal sin, but hard to imagine." (It is very important to understand that Priest D is more familiar to ranches and not factory farms. During this topic, it seemed that he was referencing these kinds of conditions rather than factory farms which, again, he is not familiar with. This is very apparent in his use of the words "at times" because the conditions of the factory farms are fairly constant for animals.)

First off, I feel justified in saying that all other priests in this study would certainly disagree with Priest E's stance that the current conditions pose no issues. During the interview, there seemed to be a comparison of the population that was usually more outwardly sympathetic towards animals supported. He was communicating that

“[contradictory]” thoughts of the population that is against eating meat, but also in favor of acts such as abortion. So, it seems that his stance is more of a reaction to the people of vegan-movement rather than to the issue itself.

It appears that most of the priest would agree that the animal welfare in factory farms are not what they ought to be. However, for them this does not then follow with abstaining from animal products from factory farms. There seems to be a couple of things at work here. First, there is permission to eat animals from the Catholic Church. Second, it is because there is permission that the default path is to seek to improve the system. Here, there seems to be a difference in strategy. A reason one might choose to abstain from animal products would be to decrease the demand and call attention to the factory farms. The priests, however, seek to participate in what is allowed while also improving the system. However, action does seem to be necessary to invoke some kind of change. It does not seem that Catholics, as a culture are getting riled up about this and seeking that change. Nevertheless, greater effort is required despite which strategies are used.

To be fair, human issues such as abortion are taking priority at the moment in the Catholic Church. Also, a lot of individual Catholics do not seem to know the extent and regularity of the welfare animals experience in factory farms.

Importantly, what is not allowed would be a forced ignorance of the conditions and other effects of factory farms. As Priest H explicitly stated, “‘turning of the head’ is a sin”. This is due to intellectual dishonesty involved in proclaiming oneself as innocent when the only reason for their innocence was due to their rejection of viewing the relevant information that was knowingly available to them. It is ultimately a deception to proclaim oneself as innocent due to self-imposed ignorance, because innocence implies

one is not knowledgeable of the significance of such information. It is rightly inferred that one who purposely “turns their head” knows that the information holds some level of significance and therefore they cannot be in a state of total innocence. Therefore, if animal welfare is something that one “turns their head” to and claims that they simply did not know, they cannot be deemed totally innocent.

The Environment

It is entirely possible to have a greater duty than normal to a lower form of creation as it relates to a higher form of creation. By this I mean, there may be special attention required, for a time, to a lower form of creation such as addressing environmental issues because these issues are greatly harming humans, the higher forms of creations. However, what this ultimately means is that you are addressing an issue of the higher form of creation by interacting with the lower form of creation. The lower form of creation I will now be addressing will be the environment.

A great concern surrounding the animal agriculture system is the impact it has on the environment. Here is a list of some of the environmental risks that factory farms pose³:

- 1) Ground application of untreated manure as a disposal method can lead to:
 - a. Excessive nutrient loading – leads to plant & animal death due to lack of O₂
 - b. Contaminate surface water
 - c. Stimulate bacteria & algal growth leading to less O₂ in surface waters

- 2) Agricultural runoff laden with chemicals (major suspect of many “dead zones” in inland and marine waters)
- 3) Waterborne chemical contaminants
- 4) 50% of soil & sediment erosion
- 5) 30% of Nitrogen & phosphorous loading in nation’s drinking water
- 6) 87% of freshwater is used for agriculture – primarily irrigation (some places at risk of losing water supply)
- 7) Livestock contribute 18% of anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions (more than from transportation sector)
- 8) Manure contributes mostly nitrous oxide
- 9) Additional pollutants surrounding factory farms
- 10) Requires disproportionate amount of fossil fuels, fertilizers, and other synthetic chemicals

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that our dominion over creation must be part of faith and area of concern²:

2456 The dominion granted by the Creator over the mineral, vegetable, and animal resources of the universe cannot be separated from respect for moral obligations, including those toward generations to come.

In addition, Pope Francis wrote an entire encyclical letter on the Environment and Catholicism which can be found in the References section below. Here are a few key quotes from the letter⁵:

“Christians in their turn “realize that their responsibility within creation, and their duty towards nature and the Creator, are an essential part of their faith”.⁵

“Clearly the Bible has no place for a tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures.”⁵

“Our relationship with the environment can never be isolated from our relationship with others and with God. Otherwise, it would be nothing more than romantic individualism dressed up in ecological garb, locking us into a stifling immanence.”⁵

When asked if the environment was included in the area of concern for Catholicism, the priests had this to say:

- Priest A stated, “Yes, Catholicism includes the environment. [I agree with Pope Francis]. Now, free will comes into play. We have the choice of participating. If we know the stuff behind what we buy than it is on their conscious. Also, this information should be more available and transparent.”

- Priest D stated, “Yes! Our faith calls us to be concerned with the rest of the world which includes the environment.”
- Priest H stated, “Yes! The view of anthropocentrism is a delusion. We are interrelated. The practices of food production need another evaluation. We must look at broader effects of it such as climate change and forest destruction.”
- Priest B stated, “Yes, but the environment is not on the top of the list. People are a higher priority. There is a difference between not using animals at all as a food source and modifying the food system so that it is sustainable.”
- Priest G stated, “A tyrannical anthropocentrism is where unkindness and destruction come in.”
- Priest E stated, “Yes. However, bigger sources ought to be looked at. Ex] Global warming & Amazon rainforest depleting (lungs of the earth). “Man-made CO2” is a distraction – a political soundbite.”
- Priest C agrees with Pope Francis

It is clear that Catholicism includes a concern for the environment. As seen above, factory farms do pose problems for the environment. Therefore, an increased attention to factory farms is warranted. Importantly, Priest B states, “There is a difference between not using animals at all as a food source and modifying the food system so that it is sustainable.” Here Priest B is portraying an image of what action moving forward would look like. This image look like a system that allows for the consumption of meat, as it is

permitted in Catholicism, but also improves the system to address environmental issues. There are two things of importance here: 1) It seems that a decrease in production of animal products will be required as the issue that come along with factory farms are so heavily a result of the size of production. 2) The demand must go down in order for the factory farms to decrease their demand (They are a business after all – they adjust for their customers and also try to get them to buy their products.) So, again we return to a difference in strategy: abstain or participate while also advocating for a more sustainable food system. Either strategy works in Catholicism, however, the former comes with responsibilities and concerns by the priests. These are discussed in the *Adopting a Vegan-Diet as part of an Individual's Catholic Faith* section below.

Section 6: Pro-Life

In this section, I will be discussing Matthew Scully's attempt to connect the Pro-Life movement with the issues in factory farms in his Pro-Life, Pro Animal article.

Pro-Life

All priests confirmed that the Catholic Church is Pro-Life in that the Catholic Church is “against all abortions” and that is morally wrong (and a mortal sin) in “every instance”. Priest D & H also added that Pro-Life “included all of life involving the beginning and end of life”. As a basis, here is what the Catechism teaches on subject abortion²:

2270 Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From the first moment of his existence, a human being must be recognized as having the rights of a person - among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life.⁷²

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you.⁷³

My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately wrought in the depths of the earth.⁷⁴

2271 Since the first century the Church has affirmed the moral evil of every procured abortion. This teaching has not changed and remains unchangeable. Direct abortion, that is to say, abortion willed either as an end or a means, is gravely contrary to the moral law:

You shall not kill the embryo by abortion and shall not cause the newborn to perish.⁷⁵

God, the Lord of life, has entrusted to men the noble mission of safeguarding life, and men must carry it out in a manner worthy of themselves. Life must be protected with the utmost care from the moment of conception: abortion and infanticide are abominable crimes.⁷⁶

2273 The inalienable right to life of every innocent human individual is a *constitutive element of a civil society and its legislation*:

"The inalienable rights of the person must be recognized and respected by civil society and the political authority. These human rights depend neither on single individuals nor on parents; nor do they represent a concession made by society and the state; they belong to human nature and are inherent in the person by virtue of the creative act from which the person took his

origin. Among such fundamental rights one should mention in this regard every human being's right to life and physical integrity from the moment of conception until death."⁸⁰

"The moment a positive law deprives a category of human beings of the protection which civil legislation ought to accord them, the state is denying the equality of all before the law. When the state does not place its power at the service of the rights of each citizen, and in particular of the more vulnerable, the very foundations of a state based on law are undermined. . . . As a consequence of the respect and protection which must be ensured for the unborn child from the moment of conception, the law must provide appropriate penal sanctions for every deliberate violation of the child's rights."⁸¹

Matthew Scully attempts to connect the Pro-Life movement with a Pro-Animal attitude in his article *Pro-Life, Pro-Animal*¹⁴. The following sections discuss the response of the priests to Scully's main connections.

Regularity & Turning a Blind Eye

Scully observes the routine and normality of abortions, which he identifies as making abortion all the worse:

- “The factory farms... are places of immense and immense suffering. And though the moral stakes are not the same as with abortion, the moral habits are, relying in both cases on the averted gaze and a smothering of empathy.”¹⁴
- He also references the Catholic Encyclopedia in identifying “a direct and essential sinfulness of the cruelty to the animal world”, continuing in saying “The offence is presumably greater when cruelty is commonplace and systematic...making customers complacent.”¹⁴

In response, the Priests had this to say:

- Priest A, “We ought not to run away from the truth and turn a blind eye to the reality of abortion or the factory farms. It is not a solution in either case. We should include more in on labels of food and increase awareness. Industrial farming should not be happening.”
- Priest D, “Some issues are more important than others Ex] Humans vs. Cow The moral stakes are much higher with humans – good distinction by Scully. There is that common habit. There is an evil in averting your gaze, but it seems most people are not doing that intentionally (some people just don’t know). Those who do know are more culpable – especially producers (but perhaps they don’t know the level of care demanded). Consumer has to have knowledge in the first place for it to start being considered being sinful. It’s regrettable that there is a disconnect from the reality of what is going on in the factory farms.”
- Priest H, “There are common moral habits.”
- Priest B “They are similar but the moral stakes are different. The averted gaze has its root in selfishness. BIG DIFFERENCE: It is wrong to subject a baby to utility. Animals are able to be subjected to utility. Cruelty to the animal world is NOT to kill (meaning cruelty doesn’t mean to not kill animals). Better phrased as “complacency” (has more merit in this situation). Gratitude is due to God for the animals.”

- Priest G, “There is question of proportion. There is a big problem in comparing the destruction of a fetus with animal treatment (Moral stakes are too different). While they are similar, there is not equal pressure or moral demands from God.”
- Priest C, “While both look away, moral stakes are too different for the argument to stick. It is because [abortion] involves the taking of a human life, they are just never going to be on par with each other morally.”

Scully makes the observance, which also very much aligns with the Pro-Life view, that in the abortion culture the focus is very frequently taken off the actual abortion procedure and victim (the unborn child/fetus) which also includes the refusal to look at real abortion pictures. The “averted gaze”¹⁴ which Scully is referencing is act of steering away from the reality of the abortion itself and putting other issues forward such as foster care, adoption, helping the mother, etc. While these are, of course, important topics of discussion, the moral issue at hand is not what happens after, but rather what happens before (the abortion itself). So, the “moral habit”¹⁴ which Scully is relating is this “averted gaze”¹⁴ in the case of factory farms. Essentially, if Pro-Lifers are upset at this habit as it applies to abortion, they should also look down upon it wherever it occurs – instances where the primary moral issue is not being prioritized.

All the priests admitted that Scully did in fact identify the common theme of an adverted gaze. Most also explicitly pointed out that doing so was a type of wrong. Earlier in the paper, we went over why a “turning of the head” was a wrong and that one could not have a claim to innocence due to it. Likewise, in the cases of the issues present in

factory farms and abortion, an averted gaze is a wrong and considered sinful. Now, it is important to realize that all we have done here is point out a common wrong present in two areas. We have simply said that there is reason to be upset about the same problem – an averted gaze – but not that if we are upset at the situation in abortion that we should therefore be upset about the situation in factory farming. The priests all see this and state that is precisely that the moral stakes are too different that the argument from this approach cannot work. The moral stakes of abortion are very much higher than in the case of animals. We can make sense of this by first referencing the Order of Creation and seeing that animals are lower than humans. Also, as Priest B points out, “animals are able to be utilized” in various ways including food (which is also confirmed in the Catechism as mentioned earlier). Also, as mentioned explicitly by Priest G & C (all priests would also agree), there is a murder of an unborn child in the case of an abortion, an evil which is nowhere close to being matched by the treatment of animals in the factory farms. (Even in the case of comparing a human abortion to an animal abortion, the human abortion would be the greater evil and tragedy.)

Priest D does make a good point in mentioning that some people do not genuinely know of the conditions of animal welfare are in factory farms. Rightly, they ought not to be culpable of any wrong doing due to this ignorance if it is, in fact, genuine. At the same time, Priest A also thinks we ought to be more aware and that this awareness should be more heavily provided by the producers.

Animals as a Commodity

Matthew Scully also mentions that “Pope Benedict XVI cautioned against ‘the degrading of living creatures to a commodity,’ with reference to the ‘industrial use of animals.’”¹⁴

In response, the Priests had this to say:

- Priest D “We treat animals as a commodity. We should treat them responsibly as a gift.”
- Priest H “There is a difference between creation & a commodity. We are all interconnected. There is a “domination” kind of attitude. We treat them as a commodity. This is related to ethics, profit, desire for food, and population.”
- Priest B “Yes, but be careful. Do not make humans equal of animals and inanimate (inanimate objects).”
- Priest G Agrees with Pope Benedict XVI
- Priest C Agrees with Pope Benedict XVI

Abortion also reduces an unborn baby to a commodity. This is because the abortion industry treats the unborn baby as a product. Abortion clinics adjust the pricing based on the point of time of the pregnancy.¹² In this price adjustment, the value of life is not considered, only the cost of surgical/medical means. Essentially, there is an item whose life is priced based on difficulty of terminating it (life itself has a price-tag

attached). Scully also Pope Benedict XVI quote of cautioning against “the degrading of living creatures to a commodity.”¹⁴ It is important to note that Pope Benedict XVI was, in fact, directly addressing animals. Furthermore, Pope Benedict XVI would undoubtedly view a greater injustice and evil if humans were being treated as commodity. On these grounds (reducing humans to a commodity), we can see why Catholicism would be against abortion. With this common theme, we can see how reducing a life would also be problematic in other sentient beings – animals. However, it can easily be inferred that Catholicism would have the greater objection to humans as they are higher in the Order of Creation. Priest B confirms this in saying, “Yes, but be careful. Do not make humans equal of animals and inanimate (inanimate objects).” What Priest B is saying is that while both areas include reducing life to a commodity, we should not then equate the severities of wrongness. Therefore, the same level of urgency and intensity of reaction ought not to be the same either (greater urgency and intensity of reaction is due to abortion).

Uniquely, Scully’s claim here is more aimed specifically towards animals in factory farms rather than an outright connection (the connection is more implied in this context). So, moving forward, we will address in the context Scully presents: animals in factory farms. Priest H, echoes our discussion on the wrong view of our dominion. Dominion should not be carried out with a “mastery”⁵ or “domination kind of attitude”⁵, but rather as “a responsible stewardship”⁵ (which was discussed above). While all priests agree with Pope Benedict XVI’s statement, Priest D & H outwardly states that we are, in fact, “[treating] animals as a commodity.” Priest D goes on to say that “we should treat them responsibly as a gift” from God. This would undoubtedly involve increased animal welfare. This is because the commodity treatment has to do with the manner in which

animals are handled which is translated to the term: animal welfare. It is then within Catholicism to demand better animal welfare, but also keep in mind that this does not necessarily involve abstaining from animal products. The goal of Catholicism would be to improve animal welfare and make sure the factory farms are treating them responsibly and as gifts rather as products. The method in doing this can involve a vegan diet (discussed further below), but definitely does not have to. Also, the priority of humans issues severe as abortion ought to always be higher than issues concerning animals. At the same time, to reiterate, one can have a greater duty towards a lower form of creation when it is greatly affecting the higher form of creation. However, abortion will always be a great wrong and few, if any, actions/situations can ever be higher.

Convenience

Commenting directly on factory farms, Matthew Scully states: “Factory farming amount to a complete subordination of animal life to human convenience...”¹⁴ – a theme also present in the “abortion culture.”¹⁴

- b. Do you think this is a fair comparison? If so, are the implications? If not, why?

In response, the Priests had this to say:

- Priest D, “Human is a much graver matter. There is convenience in both. The food system’s goal and ours is to have quicker, cheaper, and faster food/production. Also, an increase in profit motivates this as well. All of

this promotes malpractices. We must be careful to let convenience drive our actions. Animals are closer to being treated as something to be discarded, where we ought to be stewards.”

- Priest H, “He 90% agrees with connection. The demand (desire) for animal products is very high, however, moderation is needed. We must seriously ask ourselves, “Do we need to go this far to fill our wants?” 10% - What is the solution?”
- Priest B, “There are similarities, but be careful. Do not make humans equal of animals.”
- Priest G, “Fair & Unfair – similar them but not on same level as human life.”
- Priest C, “No, not merely a matter of convenience. This exists now as a main food and byproduct source. It would be impossible to simply shut it down.”

A common stance of the Pro-Life view is that the overwhelming majority of abortions are done out of some form of convenience (cases of rape or incest will be discussed below). It could simply be that a woman does not want to get pregnant or have a child at a certain point in her life or in its entirety (or also a man does not want her to and so pressures her into having an abortion). It could also be that the mother feels that she would not be able to support the child and all that entails and involves, personal reputation, age of pregnancy, the emotions associated with the father. While all of these present their challenges and are difficult, an abortion is ultimately an avoidance of those

challenges and difficulties resulting in the act being a form of convenience. This is not an attempt to belittle or disregard the reality of just how difficult these situations are, but an honest look at what is actually going on. In other contexts, relieving oneself of major difficulties could absolutely be seen as permissible and sometimes even a good thing. However, in this instance what is at stake is a human life. The Pro-Life view takes this reality very seriously and thus is fighting for that human life and keeping the life in the spotlight of concern.

Scully's claim is that the abortion takes a human life and submits it to convenience. He also notices this in the factory farms and our food system. In the consumer end of the system, the customer wants meat, wants a lot of it, wants it quickly, and wants it for cheap. The response is for the producer to produce in the same manner – high volume, quickly, and cheaply (hence the term factory farm). These methods thus treat the animals in a way that is most convenient for the factory farms – as many animals as possible in as little space as possible and to move them as quickly and efficiently as possible. While there have been efforts to match efficiency with increasing welfare, such as Temple Grandin's contributions to cattle ranches and slaughterhouses, harmful conditions still remain for the animals, for the environment, and surrounding communities. Scully's main point is that factory farms do not really take the animal's needs into account, but rather their own. Likewise, so does the abortion industry in that it does not have the child's interest in mind and in fact dismisses the existence of interest at its worst.

Admittedly, this is Scully's best parallel. As referenced earlier, our dominion is not to be interpreted as a mastery which is what seems to be going on in factory farms

more than not.⁵ Most of the priests also admitted to the similarities, but urged, again, that humans are above animals and therefore there is greater moral demand and urgency for addressing abortion. Priest D and H add that moderation is needed in our society and cautioned against convenience driving our decisions. Priest H then asks if “we need to go this far to fill our wants”. Priest H uses the key word “wants” implying that the demand we have created for meat is not necessary. Earlier in this paper, a majority of the priests agreed that either our meat consumption is excessive or can be excessive. Priest H is also asking if the consequences of factory farms are a necessary byproduct. In other words, are our wants legitimate enough to accept these consequences? As stated above, most of the priests would disagree – our meat consumption is excessive. However, Priest H then continues in saying “What is the solution?” As Priest C states, “This exists now as a main food and byproduct source. It would be impossible to simply shut it down.” While it is easy to critique the food system for all its faults, there is the reality that there is not really an easy alternative to turn for staple foods and byproducts (a lot of which include non-food items such as soaps or even as trivial as nail polishes, and crayons). There needs to be more of a proposed solution. A vegan response would be to simply abstain from the animal products to drive down the demand. The challenge with that is that only a collective demand makes a difference. Also, there is not a moral obligation to abstain from animal products in Catholicism. In fact, in Catholicism, animals are given to us, by God, for food. In Genesis 9:3 it states: “Every shall be food for you; I give all to you, as I gave the green plant.”¹³ (more examples are available as well). So, the general Catholic response is to create a better food system that also contains animal products. Further

below, I ask about the validity of an individual Catholic adopting a vegan diet in hopes of moving the U.S. towards a better food system.

An interesting distinction is that abortion can be simply shut down without the wide array of consequences that shutting down the current food system poses. Abortion is not a fundamental part of our society, does not have to be, should not be, and is not able to become fundamental due to its nature of being a practice produced out of convenience whereas food is a necessity for survival. The food system can be improved upon, but abortion will always be murder at any point in the pregnancy, including at conception, and is unnecessary.

Wrong in Every Instance

In reference to the welfare present in factory farms, Matthew Scully labels it as “cruelty”¹⁴ and therefore considers it wrong and “wrong in every instance”¹⁴ Do you agree?

In response, the Priests had this to say:

- Priest D, “Not enough knowledge. But if there were better ways of production, I would support it.”
- Priest H, “You can shed tears in response to the animal welfare. Animals don’t have a soul. Do that mean I can just do anything? Our treatment of animals is due to pressures of demand, profit and greed.”

- Priest B, “It can be cruelty if it meets some conditions: 1) Are you diminishing creation? 2) Proximity matters. Comparing buying known stolen tv to chick fa le (known demand set by us and factory farm conditions). Similar proximity. Social sin could be included in this case – perhaps of intemperance, gluttony, greed. What is our degree of responsibility in relation to factory farms? – fairly minimal/uncertain (meaning how culpable are we when we eat chick fa le). With knowing info – responsibility to eat less but not necessarily cut out (because it is ok to eat meat – given by God, Jesus himself ate fish). We have a responsibility to seek truth rather than forced ignorance. It is wrong to make this (vegan-diet) #1 priority. Also, it is more wrong to remain intentionally ignorant on matter of abortion.”
- Priest G, “If it is cruelty then it is wrong. There is a danger, however: There are generalizations being presented as basic truths.”
- Priest C, “Yes, in general, it is wrong and the welfare needs to change. However, you can’t just propose it and not propose a solution that helps us get away from this problem (grander scale – new food system). Scully has only provided the critique. How do we move toward what is more morally acceptable? We also need to address the related problems that would result in a change. Participating in a cruel system may make us complicit in that cruelty, but not the same as being the farmer and treating the pig cruelly. It is disingenuous to say that we are now responsible for the cruelty. However, our individual choices matter – provided we actually have a

choice for alternative foods, which some don't. It is self-evident that there is cruelty in factory farms. They aren't being treated as animals with their own natures."

The phrase "wrong and wrong in every instance" is attributed to how Pro-Life and particularly the Catholic Church views abortion. Scully attempts to attribute this same phrase as it relates to cruelty. Per the interview with the priests, cruelty is also wrong and is always wrong. The crucial part is to determine if an act is actually an act of cruelty. Priest C states explicitly that the welfare in factory farms is cruelty, but the other priest either don't have enough knowledge or are hesitant to explicitly label it as cruelty. As Priest G alludes to, we must not simply accept this as basic truth right away. First, I will attempt to explain this hesitation. "Cruel" can be defined in 3 ways: "1) disposed to inflict pain or suffering: devoid of humane feelings 2) causing or conducive to injury, grief, or pain 3) unrelieved by leniency".⁴ In response to the first definition, the term "disposed"⁴ implies an intention to inflict pain. The factory farm's intention is not to inflict pain, but to produce large amounts of animal products. The phrase "devoid of human feelings"⁴ is a little trickier. There are efforts made to reduce pain and the hope is for the death before processing itself to be painless (This is not always successful). However, further betterments to animal welfare are mainly made in response to consumer pressure. There is also a great effort to not allow public view of operations in factory farms. In response to the second definition, the term "causing"⁴ can be easily addressed: Yes, the conditions of factory farms cause animals pain. The term "conductive"⁴ complicates the second definition. "Conductive"⁴ is defined as "tending

to promote or assist.”⁴ This points to, again, intention which as discussed above is not an intention of the factory farms. The discussion then circles back to the discussion of the first definition. In response to the third definition, leniency involves an effort to reduce. This then circles back to the discussion of efforts to reduce pain above.

Priest B also has interesting qualifications for cruelty. The first qualification is “Are you diminishing creation?” As discussed above, animals are reduced to a commodity in the factory farms and sometimes even in the general public’s attitude towards them. To add to this, animals are often not able to display natural behaviors which further demonstrates the treatment of animals as a commodity.² This certainly is diminishing creation. So, the first qualification is satisfied. The second qualification is “Proximity matters.” Obviously, the closer one is to a direct cause the more responsibility one has for an appropriate response. It is important to bring up again that knowledge is required for culpability of a wrong – either knowledge that it is a wrong or knowledge of background information such as the sourcing of our food (which would be included in determining if something was, in fact, a wrong). As Priest B states, “We have a responsibility to seek truth rather than forced ignorance.” (This is important to bring up because even if something was a direct cause, but a person did not know of any grave consequences that would come of it, that person would not be made culpable of those consequences. For example, if a person pressed a random button for the sake of pressing a button (ignoring the reasoning for there being a button in the first place or the weirdness associated with a random button being a in any particular location or any reasons that the person was in any particular location) and it killed someone, the Catholic Church would not hold them culpable even though they were the direct cause of the death of another

person because they were unaware of the consequences and there was absolutely no intention of killing anybody (It can also be agreed upon that the person(s) who set up the button rigged to kill someone would be held culpable and the more direct cause of the person's death)). Priest B then wrestled with the comparison someone knowingly buying a stolen tv and eating a chicken sandwich when also knowing the issues associated with factory farms and the demand set by consumers. In both cases, there is knowledge of wrongs. There is a difference in proximity, however, because the issues of the factory farms are not totally in control of the consumer whereas the choice of buying a stolen TV is completely in control of the person. Priest B then concludes that, with the knowledge mentioned above, "Our degree of culpability in relation to factory farms is fairly minimal/uncertain and that there is a responsibility to eat less meat but not necessarily cut out because Catholicism allows the consumption of meat." Priest B then further iterates that animals are "given by God to us for food" (which was also discussed above) and then further illustrates the point in saying "Jesus himself ate fish." Priest C on the other hand has a slightly different view in saying, "Participating in a cruel system may make us complicit in that cruelty, but not the same as being the farmer and treating the pig cruelly. It is disingenuous to say that we are now responsible for the cruelty." Priest C is basically saying the same thing as Priest B in saying that we are not directly responsible for the cruelty in factory farms, which is, of course, true – the consumer is on the paying end. However, as suggested by the thought experiment of Priest B above, there does seem to be some level of culpability. The consumer is not totally in the clear which may warrant some level of action on the part of the consumer. to address Priest C's statement of saying the animal welfare in factory farms "is wrong and the welfare needs to change."

While we discussed above the hesitance to label animal welfare as cruelty, it can be agreed that the animal welfare is not up to how it should be. As Priest C states, “It is self-evident that there is cruelty in factory farms. They aren’t being treated as animals with their own natures.” This would echo Priest B in that there is some “diminishing of creation” in that what we see in factory farms is not animals being treated as animals, but rather as products that Priest G even states as closer to being “imprisoned” than say housed. It is easy to imagine that there are better ways of raising these animals. Examples would include, less crowded areas, bigger cages, less hormones, and perhaps some type of confirmation of an animal’s death before it enters the rest of the (would be painful part of the) factory farm. However, as Priest C alludes to, there are practical challenges in this. First, the demand is high and these conditions are motivated by this demand. So perhaps, there need to be work on lowering that demand from the consumers. As Priest B states, with the knowledge of factory farms, there is a “responsibility to eat less meat but not necessarily cut out.” Second, how does this look? Priest C then states, “You can’t just propose [the connection] and not propose a solution that helps us get away from this problem. Scully has only provided the critique. How do we move toward what is more morally acceptable? We also need to address the related problems that would result in a change.” The fact remains that while there is a problem, an alternative food system has still not been proposed by Scully. While I would not expect Scully to single handedly redesign the entire food system of America, there does seem to be some sense to what Priest C is saying. If we are allowed to eat meat, according to Catholicism, and there are no alternatives of food sourcing (without getting impractically expensive), what is the individual really supposed to do? Priest C then goes on to say, “Our individual choices

matter – provided we actually have a choice for alternative foods, which some don't.”⁶

So, if we practically do have access to alternative foods, then choosing to modify our diets would be a good step in reaction to the factory farms. In the *Veganism as a Gesture* section below, a change in diet is discussed in the context of one's Catholic faith.

Priest H points out that “our treatment of animals [in factory farms] is due to pressures of demand, profit and greed.” In this statement there is reference to the customer as well as the producer. The demand comes from the consumer, and from the producer comes the goal of profit along with greed. As mentioned earlier, the factory farms main goal is to turn a profit – they are a business after all. This main prioritization of profit is what allows for the deprioritization of welfare resulting in the problematic welfare we see today. In addition, the high demand by the consumer creates the high need for supply which then creates what we see today: facilities that can match the demand of the consumer in the way that they desire – quickly, large quantities, and at a relatively cheap price.

Priest H and Priest B make references to the Order of Creation. Priest H states that “Animals do not have souls.” He then asks the question, “Does this mean that I can then do anything?” Obviously, in Catholicism the answer is no because there is still concern warranted towards animals. As discussed in the animal welfare section, there is still work to be done in improving animal welfare and Catholicism would certainly agree. The worry, again, is elevating humans to the same level of abortion in the Order of Creation and priority of concern. Therefore, there is a worry in equating abortion with animal welfare which as previously discussed, is simply not permissible in Catholicism. Priest B expresses this explicitly by stating “It is wrong to make this [vegan-diet] the #1 priority.

Also, it is more wrong to remain intentionally ignorant on matter of abortion.” In both these sentences Priest B is referencing the Order of Creation in order to clearly display the just order of internal concern and the practices (personal practices, legal protest, interpersonal discussion, social media, etc.) in response of that concern. In the second sentence, Priest B clearly identifies the greater evil (abortion). This is due to humans being higher in the Order of Creation. Abortion is the murder of an innocent unborn child thus “it is more wrong to remain intentionally ignorant on matter of abortion” than being intentionally ignorant on the issues involved in factory farming.

No Hard Cases & Alternatives, No Claim to Necessity

Lastly, unlike abortion, Scully claims that there are no “hard cases in factory farming to blur the issue”¹⁴ (most likely referencing cases of rape or incest that motivate an abortion). He thinks that this should make it even more clear that given that there are “an [abundance] of alternatives”¹⁴, there ought not to be any “claim of necessity”¹⁴ I then asked if the priest thought Scully was correct in this conclusion.

In response, the Priests had this to say:

- Priest H, “Weight of ethics is not the same. It could imply a change in diet. I think the [food] system will eventually change.”

- Priest B, “Scully is conflating abortion with animals. Catholic position: Abortion is an intrinsic evil – there is never a case where it is ok. Case of incest & rape: It is not justified to punish the 3rd person (baby) for what the 2nd did. There is no moral obligation not to eat meat. There IS a moral obligation not to have an abortion. There may also be a necessity for people to eat meat, namely children, or people who don’t have access to alternatives. It seems that he is using the critique of welfare as a means to an end to argue you should not eat meat. It’s ok to eat meat, and we would like to take the cruelty out of it. ‘How?’ is the issue. If I am eating them with cruelty – it would be ok if I am reducing demand via less meat consumption and advocating lessening of cruelty.”
- Priest G, “True on 1 level – He does not agree that Pro-Life = Pro-Animal. You could say industrialization is wrong on its own. While neither lead to a better society, neither leads to another.”
- Priest C, “There are some who genuinely don’t have a choice (lack of access or physical inability). He is speaking from a place of privilege and only looking at one side of the argument (just on factory farms). After all, even a plant-based diet doesn’t fix all the problems (distribution system & problems further down the chain). It doesn’t free us from moral obligation or questions.”
- Priest E “We ought not to humanize animals.”
- Priest B, “It is tragic that people are more concerned and sensitive to animals than abortion. There should be a higher priority in fighting

abortion than fighting for animals! Humans are higher on the hierarchy of being. We need to conform lower goods to the higher goods. Our intellect should rule our will when our emotions are not acting according to truth.”

A common Pro-Choice scenario presented when talking about abortion is the phrase, “Well what about cases of abortion or incest?” These are presented as the hardest cases and are brought forth to combat the notion of completely banning of abortion and also, more importantly, banning abortion to any capacity. Scully would view these cases as “blurring the issue”¹⁴ in that they are not so straight forward as the “convenience” cases. However, it is crucial to understand that these cases account for the vast minority of abortions. According to an anonymous survey conducted by the Guttmacher Institute, rape and incest accounted for 1% and <0.5% of reasoning behind an abortion, respectively.⁶ Therefore, it would be inappropriate to argue to allow abortions across the board on the grounds of rape & incest cases if the “[blurry]”¹⁴ part is such a minute portion. Priest B actually addresses these cases in saying, “It is not justified to punish the 3rd person (baby) for what the 2nd did.” Essentially, the person receiving punishment (the unborn child) for the injustice is not the appropriate person. The unborn child is innocent in this case and does not deserve an ending of its life for the actions of another. Therefore, as Priest B states, “Abortion is an intrinsic evil – there is never a case where it is okay.” I would like to add that none of priests or myself are in anyway disregarding the physical, psychological, and emotional damage that come along with these cases. There are absolutely grave wrongs committed in these cases.

Scully claims that there are “no hard cases”¹⁴ in factory farms meaning that there are no cases where the treatment of animals or consequences of factory farms are complicated by difficult situations. He then goes on to say that given that in the U.S there are many alternate foods for us to eat, there really is not an argument to say that we need to eat meat or animal products. In addition, we run into the same problem mentioned in the *Commodity* section: It is within Catholicism to demand better animal welfare, but also keep in mind that this does not necessarily involve abstaining from animal products. The goal of Catholicism would be to improve animal welfare and make sure the factory farms are treating them responsibly and as gifts rather than products. The method in doing this can involve a vegan diet (discussed further below), but definitely does not have to. More importantly, however, we must see if what Scully is pointing out follows that a Pro-Life stance also involves abstaining from animal products. The priest does not agree with this proposal. Priest B explicitly states, “Scully is conflating abortion with animals.” By this Priest means that Scully in trying to make the Pro-Life Pro-Animal connection, he is drawing the severity of the wrong occurring in factory farms too close to the severity of wrong that occurs in an abortion. Priest H confirms this in saying “Weight of ethics is not the same.”⁶ Priest G illustrates the same idea with a slightly different angle in stating, “You could say industrialization is wrong on its own. While neither lead to a better society, neither leads to another.”⁶ This echoes what was discussed earlier in the paper: Scully has identified two wrongs with common themes, but has really only done that. Priest B further clarifies this in saying, “There is no moral obligation not to eat meat. There is a moral obligation not to have an abortion.” While we can be upset in both areas for similar reasons, the morality concerning the two are too distinct in severity and

context (animal vs. human). Priest B comments further in saying, “It is tragic that people are more concerned and sensitive to animals than abortion. There should be a higher priority in fighting abortion than fighting for animals! Humans are higher on the hierarchy of being. We need to conform lower goods to the higher goods. Our intellect should rule our will when our emotions are not acting according to truth.” The last sentence is stating that even if for some reason we are drawn more emotionally to lower goods, such as animals, we must use our intellect to focus more of our attention and effort to higher goods, such as humans. The same process would apply if someone were more emotionally concerned about land over animals.

Priest C also pointed out that Scully is focusing too heavily on the factory farms as it applies to our reaction. Priest C states, “There are some who genuinely don’t have a choice (lack of access or physical inability). He is speaking from a place of privilege and only looking at one side of the argument (just on factory farms). After all, even a plant-based diet doesn’t fix all the problems (distribution system & problems further down the chain). It doesn’t free us from moral obligation or questions.” What Priest C is referencing is more rural areas where food is actually very limited in quantity and variety (picture areas with one grocery store or 2 hours away). For these people, there really is not an abundance of alternatives because there may not even be alternative foods that they have access to. It is then unfair to say that “there are no hard cases.”

Priest B then describes what he considers would be a good course of action in response to the issues present in factory farms. Priest B states, “It’s ok to eat meat, and we would like to take the cruelty out of it.” “How?” is the issue. If I am eating [animals] with [the] cruelty [involved in the background], it would be okay if I am reducing

demand via less meat consumption and advocating lessening of cruelty.” What Priest B is recognizing the cruelty, but at the same time realizing that it is far from realizing an actual change. So, in response, an effort to become part of the collective in reducing demand by lessening the individual’s meat consumption as well as advocating for less cruelty would be an adequate response. This would fit into Catholicism since it is acting within the allowance of meat consumption as well as reacting to the cruelty present.

The Big Takeaway

While the priests could see that Matthew Scully had made some interesting comparisons, the “moral stakes”¹⁴ are simply too far apart for them to agree with the notion that to be Pro-Life also followed directly with being Pro-Animal in the context that we must then abstain from meat. What has been agreed upon by the priests is that we ought not to engage in self-imposed ignorance, improve the welfare of animals in factory farms, and not base our actions merely on convenience. Rather, we must act on what is responsible and maintains the dignity of creation appropriately within the Order of Creation.

Section 7: Veganism

In this section, I will be discussing factory farms and the effects it has on animals and the environment. Factory farms present problems for “public health, the environment, animal welfare, and impacts on rural communities.”²

The Current Vegan Movement

When asked what emphasis they think the current vegan movement places on animals:

- Priest B stated that it placed “animals above humans”, “[overprioritized]” animals over “human issues” and “would rather deal with [animal problems] rather than issues of human beings”
- Priest G stated that it “raised animals to a semi-human state.”
- Priest E stated that it “gives animals a *nature* that [they] don’t have.”
- Priest C & D stated they had insufficient knowledge. However, Priest D did add, “Concern for treatment of animals is good to the extent that animal concern is not put above human concern. There can be an extreme where the same or greater rights/dignity is afforded to animals than to humans which is not aligned with Church teaching.”
- Priest G also added a critique to the vegan movement in saying, “The vegan movement has an undertone of ‘This is what I believe & I want you to do it too.’ There is a forceful, accusing, and shaming into the idea. It does not propose it as an act of freedom.”⁶ This echoed the feelings of Priest A who commented that you “shouldn’t press everyone to be vegan.”

The Catholic Church would not support a vegan diet proposed within the general framework that current vegan movement proposes, as it does not abide by the Order of Creation.

Adopting a Vegan-Diet as part of an Individual's Catholic Faith

Priest B would support a vegan diet as an extension of a person's Catholic faith: "Yeah, go for it." He did add that he thinks "it is great to share [their reasoning] with other people" and "bring light to the ethical issues involved", but not to "impose it as a moral obligation when it is not – To tell people that because they are Catholic, they must ought to eat [a vegan-diet], is a misrepresentation of the Church's teaching." It would be okay to say "I think [a vegan-diet] is a natural outflow of Catholicism, it's not morally obligated, but I think it would be a good, beneficial, and helpful thing." Priest D also would support a vegan-diet as well if it is a way of "expressing love for God and His creation – "I don't see any issue with that at all." However, he did add that it is possible to "have a diet that involves meat that still expresses their love for God & creation." Easy examples would include 1) "Ethically raising their animals" 2) Hunting with great respect for animals. Priest D worries that pushing vegan may "give off the wrong message: If you really love God's creation, you'll give up meat. I don't think that is the correct interpretation of our faith and the relationship between man* and animals."

Priest C "Individuals can then respond and choose to abstain from meat/animal products, but are not obligated to – some people simply don't have the option. It must be addressed based on specific situations."

*Referring to the "human species" and not gender/sex

Veganism as a Gesture

The reality is that animal agriculture is a massive institution. It has been motivated by a massive collective demand for animal products and byproducts. Therefore, only a collective decrease in demand for less animal products or an increase in demand for better animal welfare and a more sustainable model of animal agriculture, will produce any real change. The reality is: Individual actions do not make a difference on the grand scale.¹⁰ This is because the food system does not operate one a 1:1 ratio of supply & demand. Rather, it acts more like a business that anticipates demand number ranges and supplies that amount. There is a threshold that one must cross to create a change in supply. For example, a T-shirt business may have a threshold where if they sell less 30, 000 shirts a month then they will drop the supply to 35, 000. However, if that company usually sells around 39, 000 and they supply 44, 000, the chances of 1 less product bought crossing the lower threshold to then drop next month's supply is very low. Likewise, it is highly unlikely that 1 individual abstaining from animal products will successfully lower the demand to the threshold required to warrant a lowering in supply of animal products. As Michael Maniates observes, institutions and political power are what really shape and control the environmental impacts that are happening in this world.¹⁰ Therefore, what is necessary is a collective decrease in demand as well as a collective effort in order to influence the politics and institutions that are in charge of the animal agriculture world.

That being said, individual actions do have a role to play in these collective efforts. A vegan diet can serve as a gesture in the direction of improving animal welfare and the impacts the animal factory farms have on the world. While individual vegan diets

do not make a tangible difference, they signal disapproval of the animal welfare, a type of integral response to not willing to partake in morally problematic systems (although Catholic teaching does not obligate a complete abstaining such as a vegan diet), a call to action, and a recognition of what can be in response to what currently is (by this is mean a better animal agriculture system as we've been discussing). Also, in Catholicism actions are not subject to value solely based on their outcomes. If an action is good, then it is good regardless of the degree to which it effects the outside world. In reference to environmental efforts such as making public transportation more efficient, cleaning up polluted bodies of water, or reusing materials, Pope Francis states⁵:

“These achievements do not solve global problems, but they do show that men and women are still capable of intervening positively. For all our limitations, gestures of generosity, solidarity and care cannot but well up within us, since we were made for love.”⁵

“We must not think that these efforts are not going to change the world. They benefit society, often unbeknown to us, for they call forth a goodness which, albeit unseen, inevitably tends to spread.”⁵

When asked if a vegan-diet could serve as a gesture in the same way as those illustrated by Pope Francis the Priests had this to say:

- Priest H “It is good to take baby steps. A good reaction are baby steps such as reusable bags & straws and a change in diet. However, not everyone needs to be vegan (may be too extreme). A call to balance is warranted.”
- Priests B stated, “It can be valid, but can also lead to a sense of superiority – which would be a lie of an obligation. A vegan-diet comes with the responsibility of clarifying your position and reasoning.”
- Priest G stated, “Sure, but are you going to force me too?”
- Priest A stated, “There should not be any rule concerning veganism – it clashes with free will”
- Priest D stated, “A vegan diet could be a gesture if previous motivation is present.” (Motivation referenced in previous section – “an extension of God’s love”)
- Priest B, stated, “It is certainly possible, but no obligation to. It is a good thing on its own (sign of commitment, etc). It doesn’t take place of big contribution but is valuable. It is important to do both.”

Most obviously, all priests are concerned with preventing the misconception/wrongful message of a vegan-diet being obligated by the Catholic Church. It does seem though, that if this is avoided and clarified, most priests would be in favor of a vegan-diet serving

as a gesture in response to factory farms. If done correctly, a vegan-diet may be able to serve in the way Pope Francis is describing, but does however come with a responsibility of clarity as expressed by Priest B.

Section 8: Conclusion

In this section, I will be discussing my overall conclusion. This section also contains my list of references.

Conclusion

Are these priests qualified to have an opinion on this matter, even if they are not familiar with the controversies surrounding factory farming? After thinking it through I would say that the priests are just as qualified to have an opinion on this matter as any of us. If I were to do a deeper dive into this subject matter, I would have to go into international business & trade, politics, and the legal situations surrounding factory farms. If anything, these priests are more qualified than I am to answer questions about how Catholicism pertains to different aspects of the world including the topic of this paper. There are two major areas of information in question: 1) The theology and understanding of Catholicism and 2) The issues involved in eating animals in America where factory farms are the major source of production. The priests are absolutely superior in my knowledge of Catholicism which is why I chose to interview them. That being said, I do think I have thought more thoroughly in the area of the ethics of consuming animals with factory farms as the main source of production. So, the project was to then introduce those thoughts and present them to the priests who held an understanding of Catholicism at a superior level. As stated in the introduction, the interviews then served the two main functions of my research: 1) Gathering data about how American Catholic priests in central Texas think about veganism 2) Soliciting peer-review on my ideas about a Catholic-motivated vegan-diet. Now, while it is apparent that some of the priests interviewed are not as aware of the issues surrounding this topic, this demonstrates a need for greater awareness rather than a rejection of their expertise. The solution to a more informed opinion is a greater supply of information. After all, the best they can do is have an opinion based on the information they have on hand. It would be

arrogant of anybody who is not an expert in either fields to say that they are more equipped to have a more informed conclusion than one who is an expert in one. Also, let us not forget that either party (experts in Catholicism or factory farms) does have to hold a better understanding of the other if they are to have a more informed conclusion of the other party. What I have attempted in this paper is to try to meet these two parties and exchange the information so that hopefully I have reached an informed conclusion. I do not hold that my conclusion is the right one, but merely the one I am convinced of based on the research I have conducted.

I will say that I would not be surprised that the priests who haven't seen the normal practices of factory farms would react in a way that was sympathetic to those that choose to not eat meat on the grounds of animal welfare in factory farms. In my opinion, there ought to be more of a reaction to factory farms by Catholics. I would also like to point out that lessening of animal products in our diet would also fit the proposal in my thesis as I presented veganism as an ideal for a change in diet rather than an obligation. To reiterate, doing so does come with responsibility of communicating the framework in which you are practicing this new diet. A Catholic must uphold the Order of Creation and never attempt to elevate animals to that of humans and also must prioritize their actions in response to the Order of Creation as well. There is no obligation to change your diet to a vegan-diet from a Catholicism point of view, but it can be valid given that it is motivated and framed from an appropriate Catholic stance. While Priest B explicitly stated that "There *is* misuse/mistreatment involved in the conditions in the factories. We ought to reduce our meat consumption.", this was only explicitly stated by one priest in this session of interviews. So, given that only one priest stated this I cannot hold it as

universal. If there is an obligation of a change in diet, in this case being reducing our meat consumption, this would be conditional on the individual possessing the knowledge of the issues involved in the sourcing of the food regularly consumed. Another take on this quote is a type of plea to the general public towards a practice of simplicity with the products we consume. It is clear that excessive consumption leads to serious problems for multiple parties. What I can hold as universal is that Catholicism would call for a more sustainable food system with greatly improved animal welfare conditions as well as an overall greater simplicity of life. In conclusion, while a vegan-diet is not an obligation, there is absolutely good reason to do so.

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