JAMES McCARTIN: Welcome, one and all, to this evening’s forum, “Our Planet’s Keeper? The Environment, the Poor, and the Struggle for Justice.”

On behalf of the Fordham Center on Religion and Culture, and also on behalf of our cosponsor this evening, greenfaith: Interfaith Partners for the Environment, it is a pleasure to welcome three very distinguished guests, each of whom would have been a worthy keynoter in his or her own right. But on the theory that three great minds is better than one, greenfaith and CRC got them all together this evening.

Welcome, Your Eminence, Cardinal Óscar Rodriguez Maradiaga. Welcome, Professor Jeffrey Sachs. And welcome to Joan Rosenhauer, about whom I will say a few introductory words in a moment.

The environment has been afforded increasing prominence in our newsfeeds over recent years, but in recent months, in the wake of Pope Francis’s encyclical Laudato si’, the conversation, I think, has taken an especially significant turn. Among the many important interventions that the Pope made with his encyclical, it seems to me perhaps the most important is that he stirred in the minds of ordinary people, a growing number of ordinary people, a sense of connection between the themes of poverty, human poverty, and environmental destruction. Just as we are here tonight, more and more people are considering the interplay, the connection between these two themes, poverty and the environment, that not so long ago seemed distinct and separate phenomena.

With the help of Laudato si’, our attention is turning from the environment as an abstraction to the environment as deeply connected to the dignity and sanctity of the human person, especially of those persons whose dignity, whose health, and whose safety are daily imperiled by the circumstances of dire poverty. To help flesh all this out, this connection, and to help consider how we, as individuals, as citizens, as Americans, might best respond, we have brought together tonight’s panel.
Two matters of business before we bring them in. You know that I am going to ask you to shut off your electronic devices. Please do that.

Second, to make this an interactive evening, please use the cards on your seats to write out your questions for our panelists this evening. Write them out, write them legibly, hold them up, and one of our student assistants will bring forward your questions for the final segment of our program tonight.

It is an honor for me to introduce tonight’s moderator, Joan Rosenhauer, the Executive Vice President of Catholic Relief Services, an agency whose mission is to assist U.S. Catholics to act on their faith by helping people in need around the world. Since arriving at CRS in 2009, Ms. Rosenhauer has collaborated on the ground with CRS programs on behalf of the U.S. Catholic people. She has collaborated with programs on the ground in East and Central Africa, in the Middle East, in Eastern Europe, in Southeast Asia, the Caribbean, and in Latin America.

In fact, just this past week, she was traveling in the Philippines, in part to observe how people there are responding to environmental degradation and preparing for the impacts of global climate change. Prior to joining Catholic Relief Services, Ms. Rosenhauer spent sixteen years working for the Justice and Peace Office at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

So it is clear to all of you that she comes to us with extraordinary credentials to lead a conversation on the place of faith in the work of environmental justice. Please welcome with me Joan Rosenhauer.

MS. ROSENHAUER: Good evening. It is wonderful to be here with you, to have this discussion about the gift of creation and the challenge that the Holy Father has lifted up for us in his encyclical Laudato si’ to honor that gift of creation and to recognize how our treatment of creation has to include our understanding of our brothers and sisters, both nearby and around the world. It is exciting for me to see the kind of momentum that has developed around these issues as a result of the Holy Father’s encyclical. It is the intersection of what we see going on around us and his leadership and teaching.

As Jim said, I was just recently in the Philippines. I got back Sunday night, which will explain any missteps on my part. It is the middle of the night there for me. I should have just been sleeping eight hours or something.

I was really struck to see how attentive people there are to the issue of environmental degradation and climate change. The starting point for them is that climate change is affecting them in incredible ways right now. They know that they have to prepare for increased severity and increased frequency of storms like Typhoon Haiyan that they are just barely getting over now. It just is astounding to me to see the extent to which they are aware of the importance of climate change for them, and also their own impact on the environment. People in settlements that have just barely rebuilt after Haiyan have an entire recycling system set up so that they are no longer burning their plastics and they are separating their waste. They are planting trees, doing what they can.

I had such a sense that, if they can do the kinds of things that they are doing in their context, with all the challenges that they face, how can we not step up and figure out what we can do here in the United States?
I asked one of the neighborhood, or barangay, captains, “What would you say to the delegates to the Paris treaty negotiations in late November and early December?” He said, very simply, that he would say, “Show mercy to the poor countries.” On the one hand, I think one of the challenges that we hear from the Holy Father’s encyclical and from our experience of our brothers and sisters around the world is that we have to be attentive to the poor in this conversation.

The momentum, though, that the Holy Father’s encyclical, I think, has lifted up is demonstrated in a number of other ways. We were just discussing some of the statistics. I had seen something from the Brookings Institution that suggests that 60 percent of Americans support the Holy Father’s call to address climate change. Dr. Sachs was saying 70 percent. So it is somewhere in that range, and quite a high number. That includes 70 percent or more of American Catholics who support the Holy Father’s call to address climate change.

You may also be aware that bishops from all over the world just issued a statement urging a breakthrough in Paris. That did include our own bishops here in the United States, who signed on to the statement that urged a breakthrough in Paris that included a focus on the poor, included strong limits on the increase in global temperatures, that calls for phasing out fossil fuels and replacing them with renewable energy sources, and that urges in the Paris treaty enforcement and review measures that will ensure that countries live up to their pledges.

So I think the evidence is clear that there is a lot of momentum and a lot of interest on the topic of climate change and environmental degradation and its intersection with the poor. What the Holy Father has asked us to do is to engage in dialogue about this. And that is what we are doing tonight.

We are very honored to have two quite distinguished speakers with us. Their biographies are so involved that I am going to refer to my tablet here, because there is just a great deal that they have both accomplished.

Let me begin with His Eminence Cardinal Óscar Andrés Rodriguez Maradiaga, who is the Archbishop of Tegucigalpa, Honduras. He is the President of the Episcopal Conference of Honduras and Chairman of the Council of Cardinals, that group of eight advisors from around the world that the Holy Father has called to work with him. That role has earned him the unofficial title of “Vice Pope.”

[Laughter]

He is a priest of the Salesians of Don Bosco since 1970. He holds a doctorate in theology and a diploma in psychology and psychotherapy. After several years of teaching in Salesian schools in Central America, during which time he taught chemistry, physics, and biology — so don’t let anyone say that Church leaders don’t know science — he was appointed auxiliary bishop of Tegucigalpa in 1978. After fifteen years in that role, he was elevated to the role of Archbishop of his home diocese, and in the late 1990s, he served a four-year term as President of CELAM, the Latin American Episcopal Conference. In 2001, Pope John Paul II named him a cardinal.

Between 2007 and 2015, Cardinal Rodriguez served as President of Caritas Internationalis, a confederation of Catholic aid organizations from around the globe, which is where I first met him, because CRS is one of the two members of Caritas Internationalis in the United States. That is where I learned what an effective leader he
is. Anyone who can bring together in a common mission organizations from 200 countries around the world is truly a gifted leader.

But last night I learned another dimension of his leadership, and that is his ability to bring together for effective leadership of the Church both clergy and lay people. I learned last night that in his diocese he has brought together 500 priests and 30,000 lay leaders, who together provide the leadership for the Church of Tegucigalpa.

[Applause]

As if that wasn’t all enough, he is an accomplished musician, he is also a pilot, and he is skilled in diplomacy. He represented the Holy See on issues of third-world debt, working with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. He recently returned from Rome, where he served as a delegate to the Synod of Bishops.

Please welcome His Eminence Cardinal Óscar Rodriguez.

Let me also introduce our other panelist. Then I will invite them both to offer some preliminary words.

Dr. Jeffrey Sachs is the Director of the Earth Institute, the Quetelet Professor of Sustainable Development, and professor of health policy and management at Columbia University. He is also Director of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network and has served as special advisor to United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on the Millennium Development Goals, having held the same position under former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

Professor Sachs has authored several bestselling books in recent years, including The End of Poverty, Common Wealth: Economics for a Crowded Planet, and The Age of Sustainable Development, which was published in 2015 and which I just read and I would highly recommend to all of you.

Considered to be among the world’s leading experts on economic development and the fight against poverty, he advised Pope John Paul II on the 1991 encyclical Centesimus annus. He also advised the Polish Solidarity movement during the 1980s and helped to draft a comprehensive plan for transitioning Poland from a central planning economy to a market democracy in the early 1990s.

Since the 1990s, Professor Sachs has been deeply involved in combating poverty in Africa. He directs the Millennium Villages Project, which has been credited with raising agricultural production, reducing children’s stunting, and cutting child mortality rates in several African nations. Since the adoption of the UN Millennium Goals in 2000, Professor Sachs has been the leading academic scholar and practitioner working on these goals. We will look forward to hearing from him on the new Sustainable Development Goals as well.

Please welcome Professor Jeffrey Sachs.

You can see why I had to keep that in front of me, with so much information about each of them.

But now let us start with some preliminary or introductory comments from each of our panelists. We will begin with Cardinal Rodriguez.
CARDINAL RODRIGUEZ: Thank you so much. I am very happy to be tonight with you.

I want to extend a special greeting to my friend Joe Donnelly, who has been serving with Caritas in the United Nations for many, many years. Thank you for being here, Joe.

Starting to tell you that in the encyclical Laudato si’, the Holy Father was not only writing what he wanted to do, he was consulting and listening to many, many experts. I am sure that Dr. Sachs has very important contributions to this encyclical letter, because he is very near to the Vatican through the Academy of Social Sciences, with Monsignor Sánchez Sorondo. So we are proud to have him as a counselor, as an advisor, and, of course, sharing all that the good Lord gave him to share.

When I was elected General Secretary of CELAM in 1987, I was given a very difficult task: to prepare the conference of Santo Domingo. There was a vacuum. There was no dialogue between the hierarchy of the Church and the world of economy. So they gave me this task: try to start a dialogue with these very difficult people of the world of economy. I started trying to find where to go. No one wanted to dialogue with bishops, because they say they do not know about economy; what are we going to dialogue with?

There was a famous priest in Santo Domingo who was a doctor and professor of economy. I said, “Help me. Try to find me a place where we can start a dialogue.” Curiously, there was a collaborator in the Inter-American Development Bank, who then was President of Panama, Dr. Ardito Barletta. We started working in an institute he was coordinating in California for economic studies.

But then came Pope John Paul II with the letter preparing the third millennium. At that time, I was President of CELAM, and when we visited him, he had the book and he said, pointing to that part of the letter Tertio Millennio Adveniente, that in the spirit of the Jubilee Year in the Bible, where all the debts were canceled — he said, “Please, try to do something for the most impoverished nations.” Wow.

When I started, they would say, what do priests know about economy? Then I said, “This they will not tell me anymore.” I studied economy by myself, so next time, of course, we could speak in the same language. I can tell you, it was a wonderful opportunity to talk in the World Bank, in the Inter-American Development Bank, in the International Monetary Fund. Those were times when we got very good persons in those institutions, such as Michel Camdessus, such as Dr. Wolfensohn and V.K. Lessius [phonetic]. And, of course, we fought a lot.

I recall Mr. Camdessus telling us, “Tell your people to pay. There is no place for any cancellation of debt.” I recall yesterday I was recalling a special seminar we got in Seaton Hall University where Larry Summers said, “It’s impossible to cancel the debt of the poorest people.” Some years after, he said, “It’s a matter of national security to cancel the debt.” These are the paradoxes of these things.

Why am I telling about this? Because the Pope in his encyclical said, “There is not only an economic debt, but there is an ecological debt that cannot be on the shoulders of the poorest of the poor.”

This encyclical letter was criticized strongly before being published. How do you like that? Many people talk of what they do not know. But this is what is happening. Many
times they have the ideas of a headline in a newspaper. The big danger is to talk of something you don’t know.

So the first recommendation is to read it, and not only to read it but to study it and to talk about it, to discuss about it. I have been moving since June in this environment of the encyclical. Of course, I have found people opposing strongly. When I said, “Have you read it?” Ah, things changed. So this is my first recommendation. We cannot talk and judge something we never read.

Why this kind of encyclical? Because many people were saying the Holy Father should concentrate on preaching the gospel because the faithful are leaving the Church. Why is he entering in this aspect that belongs to the field of science? Okay, more than 200 experts have collaborated with the Holy Father in these things, such as this great man. I recall once talking to one of their experts in climate change, Professor Edenhofer from Germany. He said, “I would like to talk to the Holy Father.” I said, “Yes, let me try to get you an audience.” The Pope answered me, “My agenda is full but maybe if I sacrifice my siesta I could give him half an hour.” He was nearly two hours with him because, of course, when you share all the richness you have, this is the encyclical. It is not that the Holy Father had an illumination of the Holy Spirit and he wrote. No! He was consulting and discussing and listening to so many people that you find wisdom in this beautiful document, of course.

Others asked why the Pope was writing about the global warming. This is a matter of scientists. Wrong, because this encyclical talks about global warming but only passing by, because the main argument is our common home. Every house needs maintenance. You see, especially when we live in a house that is a little old, you know that water starts coming down, and then the old tubes, the water system, the lighting, everything. So maintenance.

We ourselves go to checkups with the doctors every certain time because we need maintenance. Only our common home you mean doesn’t need? Of course needs. This is why Laudato si’ is not starting from a scientific point of view but of wisdom, in the biblical category of wisdom; that is, trying to take care of the common home.

The Holy Father said our common home, the creation, is like a sister, and we are sharing our lives in this environment. It is like a mother that receives us in her arms. But this sister now is crying out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her.

This is why the Earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor. Of course, we are concerned about poverty and about the poor, but we never consider that the Earth, our planet, our beloved Sister Earth or Mother Earth has been abandoned and maltreated.

This is the problem of the encyclical letter, trying to make us awake and to know that this is not only a problem of entrepreneurs or people of the economy or governments. It takes every single one of us, every single one. Nobody can say “This doesn’t touch me,” because we are all involved. We live here.

So he wants to enter in dialogue with all respect to our common home, enter into dialogue with all people about our common home. We cannot understand this encyclical without the category of dialogue.
It is not that the Pope is taking one party or another political party or one NGO or another NGO. No, that’s not the way. The Pope is not taking any party. The Pope is extending bridges of dialogue. That’s the service of a pontifex — making bridges. This is the meaning of the word. This is what he is doing with this encyclical letter. There are people who, after reading it, said, “This encyclical is like a new Rerum novarum.” I agree, of course, because when Leo XIII was writing Rerum novarum, it was the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. Now we live in a different revolution.

So we need to take care of the new things that are just presented. He is not inventing from zero. No, because he inherits a lot of tradition from his predecessors. Of course, he is quoting. You will see, or you saw already when you read, that he is quoting other pontifices. He was quoting especially Paul VI, the blessed Paul VI that referred to the ecological concern as a tragic consequence of unchecked human activity.

Then we start listening to another category. He is not only working on global warming or scientific results. It is about humanity, because — and I recall when we started participating in these global warming summits, the famous summits. The last once I attended (because I am no longer the president of Caritas Internationalis) was in Durban, South Africa. I said to me, “Never again. This is a waste of time.” After 12 days of beautiful discussions, but when there is no political will of committing the biggest countries to really reduce the contamination and the warming of the Earth, nothing will be achieved with these summits. In Spanish we say cumbres [phonetic].

There was a man, a very good friend of mine, who said, “It’s like an old soap opera in Latin America that was called Cumbres Borrascas [phonetic]” because this is the result of these kinds of summits — leading nowhere, where there is not any commitment. This is the reason why the Pope wanted the encyclical letter to be published in advance of the famous meeting in Paris. Unless they would take serious commitments in Paris, be ready in the Philippines to have more and more typhoons, in the Caribbean to have more and more hurricanes, in many places to have droughts — can you image California, rationing water? In Texas, terrible floodings. In other places, such as the Northeast of the United States, what an amount of snow you got last winter. And look at this autumn. What a beautiful summer we are having.

[Laughter]

So it’s complicated. We need to take seriously this challenge. So tragic consequences of unchecked human activity. We have to take our co-responsibility — all of us have responsibility in this.

Many people wanted to know, what are the politics of the Pope? Why is he mixing in politics? This is a political issue. He should not enter in that. He should preach the Gospel. But an encyclical letter is not a policy paper. It’s a letter written by the father of the family about the problems of every day.

We could say that this encyclical letter is to take seriously what all our brothers and sisters are sharing in the ordinary life of every day. The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and intemporal development, for we know that things can change. Lovely. Somebody was telling me why the Pope is so pessimistic. They didn’t read the encyclical. [Laughter]. They didn’t. From the very beginning, he said, “I am writing because I know that things can change.” Yes! And we have to commit ourselves to these
changes, not to take it as okay, we need to have resignacion, resignation. Things will happen. Okay, if I want a deluge — Louis XIV. No, we cannot.

This is one of the other perspectives of this beautiful document. We are co-responsible especially with the new generations. What kind of world are the future generations going to inherit? A garden? This is what we were given by the Creator. When we go to the book of Genesis, we know that Adam and Eve were placed in a beautiful garden. They say that that beautiful garden was between two rivers. Where are these rivers in the actual? Iraq, Mesopotamia, a desert. It was a garden. What will we inherit to the next generations? A garden or a desert? For what we are looking, it’s a danger to inherit a desert.

Please tell me when I have to stop because I didn’t come to give a talk. I came to introduce a dialogue. But we have to listen to Dr. Sachs as well. Please, you just make me like the basketball — (laughter).

JOAN ROSENHAUER: Thank you very much. I’ll have to use our poker or something.

Please, Professor Sachs.

JEFFREY SACHS: I think we would all unanimously vote for you to continue on. I know I certainly would lend all my vote for that. It is such a pleasure and honor to have you here, and we are all thrilled. I could not be more thrilled to be with you and with Joan and with all of you, and indeed, at a very important moment, because we are just a few days before what is a decisive cumbres [phonetic], and it cannot be a cumbres to nothing. It has to be one that succeeds.

We do have reason for hope in no small part because of Laudato si’ and because of the fact that we are having a moral dialogue in our world, not only a technical or political or often propagandistic discussion but a quite basic moral dialogue.

His Eminence reminded me of many recent episodes in history where it was the moral dialogue that proved to be decisive, because sometimes we think, Ah, with all of the power, with all of the influence of Exxon or Chevron or the Koch brothers or this or that, how can we actually make headway? The fact of the matter is that it has been through the moral insight that great, great truths have come.

You reminded me of some of my favorite battles and one of my favorite moments in those battles in the fight for debt relief, which for me dates 30 years and one month because I began that battle in Bolivia in the summer of 1985, calling for debt consolidation for a bankrupt country. I engaged with Mr. Campos, and I thought many, many times he’s a wonderful person. But we had many pitched battles.

In 1999 the battle was raging again because we were coming to the new millennium, and the burden of debt was crushing many African countries. There was, as always, stalemate in the international system. His Eminence was pushing the Church’s wisdom to the world and undertaking the battles he was talking about.

I was in the White House one day speaking to President Clinton. President Clinton said to me, “Yeah, I’m really passionate about this.” No other than Larry Summers came up and took me away and said, “We’ll talk to him later.” And, indeed, Mr. Summers always felt, no way, nothing can be done. No, you couldn’t pass it in Congress — the nothing-can-be-done vision, lack of vision.
So the opportunity came when Pope John Paul, with the Jubilee coming, with your voice and your role, came. I was in the most extraordinary audience you could imagine. Of course, being with Pope John Paul is the most extraordinary moment you can imagine. But how about being there with Mono, Quincy Jonas, Bob Geldof, and a few other rock stars and an economist brought along in tow?

The message, though, is that Pope John Paul met us and said, “This is the Jubilee year, and this is the moral necessity for the world.”

We flew straight back to Washington from that meeting. I always tell the story, as we left the Castel Gandolfo that moment and drove away, there were thousands of people as Mono got into the car. Thousands of kids started running behind us. I turned to him and I said, “They always do that for macroeconomists.” [Laughter] Which he did not believe.

But we flew to Washington, and it was the moral voice that prevailed. Interestingly, a very conservative congressman from Birmingham, Alabama, Spencer Bachus, said to me, “Mr. Sachs, we probably don’t agree on anything else, but we agree on this one, and we’re going to make this happen.” He said, “God’s calling on us to give relief to the poor.” A bipartisan consensus came. It transcended parties, because the call to help the poorest of the poor was something that transcended political parties. Debt relief came in the year 2000.

There is no doubt in my mind that your role and Pope John Paul and the voice of the Church was decisive in this — that this was not only another year of negotiation; this was the Jubilee year.

I want to give another example if I may because I studied it recently at some length. It was for me another opening that was a remarkable thing to see.

I wrote a book a couple of years ago about President Kennedy and how he negotiated the partial nuclear test ban treaty with the Soviet Union in 1963. Any political advisor would have said, “Don’t go there. They are our enemy. You can’t trust them, you can’t have an agreement, you can’t negotiate,” the kinds of things we’ve heard about in the Iran agreement recently, wrong now as they were wrong then.

President Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev had experienced something that all of us who were alive then knew, but they had experienced it in a way that was unique, and that was being at the precipice of human survival in the Cuban missile crisis.

After that near-complete calamity, President Kennedy said “We need to find a different way. We have to find a way to reach an agreement with our counterparts. They’re human beings. They face the same issues we face.” And Nikita Khrushchev said the same thing. Indeed, both of them decided that it was their advisors who were more or less the crazy ones and that each almost led their own leaders into war by saying, “Oh, we’ve got a bomb. We’ve got to take them out, first strike” and all the things that you see in a crisis like that could bring the world to an end.

But Pope John XXIII was also observing, and it proved to be the last months of his life. But he said at that moment, “I will give the last remaining moments of my life and my energy to helping to find peace on the planet.” He produced an encyclical in the spring of 1963, Pacem in Terris, which is one of the most important documents in modern history.
What it did was to say that international statecraft, geopolitics, power relations have to be within a moral framework, that this is not just states playing a Machiavellian game; these are governments that have civic responsibility for the well-being of the world. That is what Rerum Navarum had done in 1980 and 1991, saying in the new things there's a responsibility that's a moral responsibly for the economy. The economy is not just what the markets say; it has to operate within a moral framework.

Pope John XIII made this remarkable, passionate but brilliant statement, and I know, after having studied this, that a Russian translation was immediately dispatched by hand to Nikita Khrushchev, who was tremendously eager to receive it. President Kennedy, of course, received a copy immediately.

One of the things that it helped President Kennedy to do was to frame the issue for Americans as fundamentally a moral issue, which is very hard for American presidents in their politics and their statecraft to do.

Soon after the encyclical, President Kennedy made the most remarkable speech of any modern American president. It is called his Peace Speech, June 10, 1963, a commencement address at American University. Unlike a normal speech about foreign policy, he didn't say the Soviets should do this, this, and this. He said that if we have a fundamental, vital interest in peace and that if we are to achieve it, we as Americans have to reexamine our own attitudes. There was no list of what the Soviets had to do. It was all about what we have to do to re-imagine the possibility of peace. It is unbelievable, actually, his speech.

He said that the other side, they are human beings, they have the same interests. He said for the final analysis our most common link is we all inhabit this small planet, we all breathe the same air, we all cherish our children’s futures, and we are all mortal.

When he gave that speech, Nikita Khrushchev called in the U.S. envoy who was in Moscow, Averell Harriman, and said, “That was the finest speech by an American president since FDR. I want to make peace with this man.” Six weeks later, the partial nuclear test ban treaty was signed. Directly resulting from that, five years later, was the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.

It pulled us back from the brink being framed in a moral way, not the game-theoretic calculations, not mutual assured destruction, not here's the list of what they do, and if they follow this, here's the red line, here's this line. No. We examine our own attitudes because the other side is also human beings, and they will make the same judgment. We all inhabit this small planet.

So it was a decisive moment where an encyclical, in my view, played a fundamental role in shifting the world. And here we are. And it's happening again.

One could talk about all of the technical issues. The truth is if you want a precise scientific explanation of this, read the second chapter of the encyclical. It is very precise, very succinct modern science. If you want to know just two things to give you a sense of the science, one is walk outside this evening and remark that it's November 3 and it reached 66 or 68 degrees today. Not good. This will be the hottest year in instrument record, the hottest year for probably for probably thousands or even hundreds of thousands of years. We cannot guarantee that that is the case, but since 1880 this is the hottest. And it's not by accident.

By the way, around the world, people know it.
But if you want to get a calibration not from what you would hear maybe in some of our
propagandized media — because it is — brought to you by the oil industry or the coal
industry or Rupert Murdoch or others who have interests, not interests in the truth, the
basic facts on the climate change were calculated by hand correctly by a Nobel Laureate
Swedish chemist, Svante Arrhenius, in 1896. This is not some new, unknown, mystical
thing.

The physicists already understood that carbon dioxide absorbs infrared radiation by the
1870s. Svante Arrhenius was able to make a calculation about what the doubling of
carbon dioxide would mean for the world, and he did it accurately. For 18 months now it
would be a few maneuvers on your computer, but this is not new science, this is deeply
established science.

The Pontifical Academy of Sciences, which is one of the world’s preeminent scientific
institutions, made that very, very clear in recent years, that this is not some deep stretch,
huge uncertainty. Even if it were, you might ask for assurance. But it is not even that. It
is quite clear in the basic physics, and the observations are very, very clear.
One could discuss this from a technical level, but at this point the facts are not only
scientifically rigorously established, the risks absolutely understood, but the vast majority
of people around the world also know it because they are living the droughts, the floods,
the heat waves, the extreme storms.

Mexico last week was hit by the strongest typhoon ever recorded in the eastern Pacific or
the Atlantic, ever. Not the worst this year, not the worst in the last four seasons, ever.
Typhoon Haiyan was the strongest land-falling tropical cyclone in history. So these are
not the issues.

We could discuss — and I know I will be brief so that we can open it up for broader
discussion — we could discuss the politics, and let me summarize very quickly in the
following way:

There is no real scientific debate, but we have confabulated a political debate in this
country. This is a reflection of our money politics beyond anything else. The oil, coal,
and gas industry has been traditionally the most powerful lobby in the United States. It is
fair to say they have owned one of the political parties and they owned about half of the
other one.

But, actually, the public doesn’t want to be owned, and the public is worried about their
children, and the public now has said, “Something is not right.” We actually rather like
New York City. We don’t want to see it under water, not just of a super storm like Sandy
but I mean literally under water, which is one of the realistic scenarios if we continue the
way we’re going — I mean really under water.

So the public doesn’t want this, but the politics has held it trapped. But that chokehold
on the politics is coming unstuck, because the people want to live and they want their
children to be able to flourish. What has been a bizarre episode in our politics is coming
to an end.

If you read the Wall Street Journal — it’s a wonderful newspaper — in front is news. The
editorial page is fiction, extremely entertaining, deeply sardonic, very funny. For a long
time I thought that it was a special edition delivered to me because I thought there was no
way anybody could actually write these things, except to annoy me early in the morning.
It is a fiction newspaper, fiction, but cynical and vested interests. But even there the chokehold will end.

The other problem, and this remains a serious problem, has been that the biggest damage in the world is occurring to the poorest people who have had very little to do with this. They’ve cried out for help. Just as they cried out for help to end the colonial rule, just as they cried out for help for debt relief from an unjust financial structure, they are crying out for climate justice as well.

Twenty-three years ago when we signed the framework convention that has put us on a path of annual cumbrances, there were two lists — the rich world, so called Annex 1 because there was an annex to it that listed the countries that were at the high-income world, and the rest. The Annex 1 countries under the treaty were supposed to move first. That’s what the treaty said.

The United States signed it. President George H.W. Bush, Senior, signed the treaty, and the Senate ratified it in 1994, which under the Constitution makes it U.S. law, the law of the land.

But then the Senate, in 1997, voted 95 to nothing to say we won’t act on this until the developing countries act. This was completely contrary to what they had just ratified. It was called the Hagel-Byrd Amendment. It was a disgrace. More than that, it was an illegality if the courts had tested it.

But China said, “But we’re not on the first list. We’re poorer. You go first.” The United States said, “You’re a big country. You move together.” China said, “No. You go first.” The poorest countries said, “Will you guys do something up there before you crush us all?”

This has gone on now for a long time. This is why in 2009 the Copenhagen conference failed because China said, “You move first,” the United States said, “We’ll move together.” They couldn’t reach an agreement. The conference failed.

What has happened in the last two years is that China by now has become so rich and so dirty that they can’t breathe the air themselves anymore safely. So China knows that it has to move now, and it is so big, it has to move whether or not the United States moves, actually. And it has to move just so the air can be a little clean.

My wife and I were in Beijing last week. You really can cut the air, as the proverbial expression puts it. It is horrifying.

The Chinese leaders understand this. They were right, by the way, legally in what they’ve said all these years, that the United States was under obligation to move first.

But last year President Obama and President Xi Jinping agreed. The past is past, though with a lot more carbon in the atmosphere because of that. We will move together. This is a huge development. It is a pivotal political development, because the two largest carbon-emitting economies in the world — China is twice our emissions, but since they are four times our population, they are half per person what we emit — China and the United States have agreed. Europe is on-side. There is no part of the world that is stopping and saying, “Don’t act.” Everybody is ready to do something next month.

One last point and then I’ll stop. The poor countries are still saying, though, “What about us? We are experiencing massive disasters, massive dislocations. You are telling us we
can’t use the same kind of energy that used for development? You’re telling it is going to take you 20, 30, 40 years to adjust? What about us?”

The rich countries promised $100 million a year to help the poor countries. But even today — we’re at November 3 and the meeting starts November 30 — the rich countries have still not put on the table a plan because they don’t want to talk about that kind of justice.

So we are not home free to reach an agreement in Paris. There is a world understanding that we must act. It truly covers the whole world except for the U.S. Congress and the Wall Street Journal. But all the rest, including the White House, the American people — and I can tell you because I speak to the U.N. General Assembly with frequency — it is around the world that we must act. And with Laudato si’, we know we must act because our lives depend on it and our common home depends on it.

Pope Francis has called on us to produce a common plan for our common home. That is what we have to do, starting four weeks from now.

**JOAN ROSENHAUER:** Thank you both for giving us quite wonderful overviews of the messaging and the impact of Laudato si’ and also some hope for the conference in Paris.

One of the questions that comes up about the encyclical quite often has to do with the many different topics that the Holy Father touches on. He touches on finance and he touches on science and he touches on business policies and labor policies and so many different topics. Some critique him for being a mile wide and an inch deep, for not doing very serious analysis of all of that. But others see that as a strength, that he makes the connection among all those different sectors.

How do you see the fact that he included so many different arenas of our lives together in that encyclical? And how would you respond to the people who critique him for not offering a serious analysis of those various areas?

**CARDINAL RODRIGUEZ:** Well, you know that since Vatican II but especially in Latin America after the Conference of Medellin, we have adopted a method that is to see, to judge, and to act. This is the method that the Holy Father was using in the redaction of this encyclical letter.

He starts by seeing the reality. This is where the majority of people interact with him because he was consulting the world of economy, the world of politics, the world of culture. So that is why most of the topic came to be quoted in that chapter. Otherwise, the document should have been like a table with four legs that only were three. It would be limping because something was missing. He wanted to be as wide as possible in the vision of the reality.

This is because the encyclical letter is not a scientific treaty; it is, as Dr. Sachs said, a moral perspective and, of course, of the whole of humanity. He is not addressing only the scientific people or people of industry or people of business. He is addressing to all of us because it is my hope, he said, that this encyclical letter which is now added to the body of the Church’s social teaching, can help us to acknowledge the appeal, immensity, and urgency of the challenge we face.

That is why he tries to review many aspects of the ecological crisis. It is not only the problem with the industry of coal or petrol or whatever. It is a global perspective. Of
course, he is not writing treaties. He is only looking to the reality to illuminate it in the second chapter by the Word of God, starting from the creation and then acting.

What can we do after renouncing the problems? All of us have to start to build bridges and have to take care in our own lives, in our own families, in our own communities.

Nobody can say, okay, this is a problem of China and the United States. It is our problem. Even in the smallest community where you are polluting water, we have responsibility in that. If we are not trying to dispose of garbage in the right way, it is our common responsibility.

He goes even through the last chapter, which is beautiful, trying to build a spirituality of the caring of the creation. It is lovely how he lands. He is not a pilot, but he knows how to use the landing gear to come to the concrete aspects of ordinary life.

JOAN ROSENHAUER: One of the questions that we had gotten from the audience has to do with where you are seeing the greatest hope or the greatest points of light in terms of how people are taking up this call and responding. I guess I would ask either of you, are you seeing places where people are embracing their responsibility in developed countries, in developing countries? What do you see?

JEFFREY SACHS: Let me refer to a very important and very special and very joyous day, September 25 of this year. You may have experienced it as one of the greatest traffic jams ever in our city, but that is because there were about 170 world leaders here for the General Assembly. It was a special session on sustainable development.

Pope Francis talks about integral and sustainable development. The whole world political leadership came together. But, remarkably, who opened the session? Pope Francis. So the world leaders knew, and the secretary general invited Pope Francis to open a session to make sure that this was viewed in its moral context.

When Pope Francis spoke and you had the world’s leadership in rapt attention, I can tell you, as soon as he finished, and with a tumultuous reception, the world leaders adopted by acclamation the new sustainable development goals, or sdgs. This is extremely important for us, because this is the first part of the response of a common plan. It is not easy having a common plan with 7.3 billion people. It is not easy getting agreement almost on anything in this world. But in this case, all 193 governments have come together to say that we should put sustainable development at the center of our global cooperation.

They defined what they mean by that. Sustainable development is development that combines the economic imperatives of adding poverty and producing well-being with the social imperatives of social inclusion and ending exclusion, which Pope Francis illustrates and calls on us every day to overcome, and with environmental sustainability.

So the world has adopted a framework. I view it as a small miracle. I will ask your advice whether it is technically a miracle or not. But I view it as a small miracle that we have an agreement on this. We need to make this work.

When you read the encyclical, to come back to the previous point and tie it in with this one, I work on these issues every day. I would like to make a statement, therefore, about this question, is this superficial? This is so wonderful. You cannot even imagine how invaluable this is for practitioners, for professionals in this. The Pope gives guidance. He
really does. He gives guidance for all of us but he also gives guidance for cross-disciplinary research. He gives guidance for the kinds of solutions that are needed.

There is a wonderful paragraph here where he talks about when we speak of the environment, we really mean the relationship between nature and society. “Recognizing the reasons why a given area is polluted requires a study of the workings of a society, its economy, its behavior patterns, and the ways it grasps reality. Given the scale of change, it is no longer possible to find a specific discrete answer for each part of the problem. It is essential to seek comprehensive solutions which consider the interactions within natural systems themselves and with social systems.”

Yes to all our deans and our department chairs and our faculties. We need to work together in an integrated manner because this is really the way that the knowledge needs to be combined now to find real solutions.

We are teaching this next spring at Columbia University with my two co-faculty members, Dr. Willy Vendley and Dr. Tony Annett. This is university-grade stuff, just to be very clear at a technical level.

JOAN ROSENHAUER: I also would like to pick up this idea of divisions and bridge-building, because part of the reaction we’re seeing in this country is that there are some divisions. There are people who look at all the evidence of El Nino and the impact that it is likely to have. The government of Ethiopia just announced an expectation of the worst drought in 30 years.

Some people look at that and say, “You see, climate change is creating these terrible impacts.” Other people look at that and say, “We’ve been hearing about El Nino and drought in Ethiopia all of our lives.”

Another area of division is that Professor Sachs has written quite a bit about the impact of population on the environment. He talks about the demographic trap and the impact that that has on families but also that families have many children and then they are destined to be poor because the families cannot support them. Then the children grow up poor and it’s an ongoing cycle. But also the idea that at a certain point the population of the world stretches or crosses the planetary boundaries of the capacity of the Earth to sustain us.

The Church, of course, and the Holy Father is quite clear about the position of the Church, that the problem is not people and that the solution should not be trying to reduce the number of people, and especially the number of poor people. How do we understand those divisions and the opportunity for bridge-building? What do you see as the potential for that?

CARDINAL RODRIGUEZ: Well, you know, the starting point is this encyclical letter is not a pessimistic document, because many reading the second chapter but stopping there say, “Oh, this is so pessimistic, I will not continue the reading.” This is a big mistake because, as I said before, you cannot judge something only in a partial way. You need to have a global perspective. This is what is missing in our world.

We forgot history. History is teaching. One of the defects of many societies nowadays is that they lost memory, not because they are patients of Dr. Alzheimer’s. No. It’s because people are not reading. People are not reflecting anymore; it’s by shots of what the media is presenting now, what is presented on the Internet or maybe what’s up now.
So partial vision of reality will never lead us to solutions. This is what the Pope intends to do with this encyclical letter. Look, many times if you are looking at a light, you cannot see the whole firmament of stars in the sky. This is one of our defects. That is why it is necessary to start building bridges with all the sectors of society. Nobody can say, “This doesn’t touch me.” But it is necessary also to study.

I can tell you, I can share with you what we started with our own government. We started giving a copy of the encyclical letter to all the ministers of the government. They would say, “You’re wasting your time and your money because they are not going to read.” Yes, they did. And the minister of environment was asking for 500 copies of the encyclical letter because he wanted all of his employees to read it.

Then came the initiative of the Pope to declare September 1 the International Day of Prayer for the care of the environment, because we read in the book of Psalms that unless the Lord builds the house, in vain work the bricklayers. So we are convinced that we are not acting alone, but we are acting in alliance with the Creator who gave us our common home.

So what we have to see is that the creation belongs to all of us, the category of common good that is many times just forgotten and is the main principle for politics, the common good. It is necessary to think about this and to put it into practice.

That’s the reason why I think this encyclical letter is a call for hope that we can do something as we hope, for instance, for the summit in Paris. What Dr. Sachs just said is a great sign of hope.

Now I will be a little quieter. Everybody in Paris, because I was ready to say another Cumbres borrascosas — not anymore.

**JOAN ROSENHAUER:** Dr. Sachs, you’ve said that one of the key issues for Paris, however, is whether the developed nations step up and provide the assistance for adaptation and some mitigation among the developing countries.

One of the questions we got from our audience is what good is that money going to do in the Green Climate Fund? What can $100 million do? Why do we need that?

**JEFFREY SACHS:** First, when it comes to very poor people, a little bit can go a long way. Sometimes the rich world has the capacity to say there is no amount too small that we will deny it to the poor. This is sometimes how I feel about this.

I spend a lot of my adult life begging for what are morsels compared to the billionaires downtown. But I know that hundreds of thousands of lives every year could be saved if we could get more medicines or more bed nets. This is a small fraction of even what a few hedge fund managers take home in a year.

The fact of the matter is that poor people live on so little that small amounts make a huge difference and we should never doubt. $100 million? Even for a macroeconomist, that’s enough to open your eyes a little bit and say that could really help. It could help both on resilience, disaster response, disaster preparedness, and also to engage in low carbon energy, like solar energy, which, interestingly, is the energy of choice for the poorest people in the world, who often live in near-desert areas like the Sahel of Africa. Now with photovoltaics prices coming very far down, small amounts can make a huge difference.
I want to go back to your earlier question just for a moment to say a couple of things if I could. First, on the El Nino issue, El Nino is the phenomenon of the warm water coming from the western Pacific to the eastern Pacific. We have a very big El Nino this year. It could be the biggest on record in fact.

That has an overall warming effect. It tends to be quite dislocating for a lot of the world. We are seeing many dislocations in many parts of the world. It is coming on top of a rising trend of temperature, so everything gets exacerbated. So if El Nino is normally relatively warm, now it is super warm. It’s an add-on. Whether it itself is exacerbated by long-term climate change, we will find out. We don’t know yet because there is a lot of underlying difficult science that is still to be resolved on that.

The irony is that the skeptics have said in the past, “Oh, warming has stopped because 1998 was warmer than the next few years.” Many of us spent a lot of time saying, “Well, that was an El Nino year. You shouldn’t compare a heavy El Nino year to the next years.”

Now that we have another El Nino year, now they want to talk about it not as warming but as El Nino, which fine, but just to tell you it’s going to be a lot warmer this year than 1998 because the upward trend is there.

So that argument that it somehow dismisses concerns is scientifically bogus. By bogus I don’t mean just wrong. I mean it’s a machine of propaganda that has been spewing this out, and it is absurd. It is the same firms — they happen not to be downtown; they are on Madison Avenue — that did it for the tobacco industry and did it for others. It’s a game. If you’re in the middle of it, you see the game very clearly. If you’re just trying to read the newspapers or listen to the news, it’s a little bit harder. But it is a game. This is serious, real, worsening.

Again, I want to say a word about the population issue, which is obviously extremely complicated and contentious. When Pope Francis left the Philippines, he turned to a poor woman with seven children and said, “Being Catholic does not mean breeding like rabbits, if you’ll pardon the expression.” Pope Francis said that. Now I can speak.

The Church has long had a doctrine of responsible parenthood. If you go to Humanae Vitae or the whole tradition of the social teachings, parents need to be able to raise their children in a responsible way with decent nutrition, with adequate health, with adequate education. This is hard to do in this world.

I am a practicing development economist. I work in the poorest places in the world. I can tell you, if you are an impoverished family with seven or eight children, you cannot raise them with responsible parenthood. You can love them, but you cannot give them the basic nutrition. You cannot give them the basic healthcare. You cannot ensure their brain development, and you cannot get them through school. As a development economist, this is my profound concern.

Climate change is not about population. Anyone who tries to pin that argument is playing another game. They are playing a manipulation game. I felt it in Websites this spring. I never said it and I don’t say it, but I do say that for the poorest households, responsible parenthood is an important concept, and I think it is absolutely one that should be developed, explained, and helped. It’s the right concept and it is extremely important, in my opinion, that all of us as parents can raise children to their full potential.
We know more and more about what that means scientifically. It means that the brain needs to be fed adequately at the right age with basic nutrients, with Omega-3 fatty acids, with all of the vitamins. If that doesn’t happen, a child loses the potential for a lifetime. I see it. My wife, who is a medical doctor, a public health specialist, sees it all over Africa. That’s the issue from my point of view.

JOAN ROSENHAUER: Cardinal Rodriguez, is there anything you would like to add?

CARDINAL RODRIGUEZ: No. I continue because I agree totally with Dr. Sachs. When you will read the final result of our just-ended synod, you will see that it is enhancing strongly in this, in responsibility in parenthood.

I recall, when the Pope was saying that phrase, how strongly he was criticized, and people saying, “How come the Holy Father is talking with this language?” Because it is the language that people understand. It is necessary to reflect on that because one of the problems we face is this: Many times when we see young people looking for work, you immediately notice that these people did not have the proper nutrition when they were children, because now when they are young, they look like normal persons, but they miss very important capacities to continue studying or to develop themselves in a very human way.

This is a very complicated problem that has to be faced courageously by all the pastors of the Church and by all the families, because this is also one of the weak points, education of the family in the family. It is not just a matter to say, “Okay, you go to school.” Many times in school they never face this real problem.

Then comes, for instance, in our countries in Latin America, the problem of pregnancies of teenagers, girls, who never got sex education, never. This was a taboo and this is the biggest mistake. We have to face this clearly and fearlessly. This is a real problem, and we have to face it with responsibility and courage.

[Applause]

JOAN ROSENHAUER: We have gone a little bit over time. I know some people had to leave, but a lot of us are just fascinated by this conversation. Let me invite you each to say one sentence — and I mean it, one sentence — that is the key message that this group in this room needs to understand about what this encyclical calls them to and what the reality we are facing calls them to. What do the people in this room need to do as a result of this reality and the encyclical?

Professor Sachs, one sentence.

JEFFREY SACHS: I am going to use my sentence in a different way and that is to thank you, Cardinal. Your leadership and the Church’s leadership are so vital right now.

There is no way we are going to solve the problems of this world unless we choose — we wake up, as you said, we overcome what Pope Francis has called the globalization of indifference, the most powerful phrase I know to describe what really we have. We have to wake up and we have to choose.

While there are technical choices — should we have solar or should we have wind power? — the ultimate choice is the moral choice. That’s why the Church’s leadership is so essential for our time.
[Applause]

**CARDINAL RODRIGUEZ:** And for me, please do not leave this encyclical letter in the bookshelf. Put it in practice. Spread it out to everybody you can, because it is necessary that society raise conscience from the bottom, from the grass roots. And you are the ones who can help with that.

In the university, of course, we can even ask them, okay, you will give a particular exam on the encyclical letter — yes, yes. Sometimes I do that because I teach, I still teach.

Okay, we can do that. But the best thing is I have the responsibility to spread this out to people who never heard about it. There are a lot of people. If they do not know, they cannot put it in practice. We need all the people to put it in practice in their concern to their particular families or groups or faith communities or whatever. This is testing, too.

Be also together with the Jubilee year of mercy, because the Pope was reminding us of the works of mercy. One of the works of mercy is not only feeding the poor or giving drinking water. These are matters that take directly to the arguments of this encyclical letter. So, please have mercy of all your brothers and sisters and spread out the encyclical letter.

[Applause]

**JOAN ROSENHAUER:** And now it is my pleasure to invite up Father John mcshane, the president of Fordham University, to bring this event to a close.

**FATHER McSHANE:** I would ask you just to look out. This is a packed house. I think that if we held it anywhere else, it would have been a packed house as well.

The interest in the encyclical is very high, even among those who have not read it, your Eminence. The interest is very high.

Tonight we had a great gathering. We were given context. Dr. Sachs, you gave us a tremendous context to place this document really in a line with everything that went before it, from Rerum Novarum all the way up. Your Eminence, your contagious enthusiasm for the evangelical work of spreading the word about the encyclical I think has inspired all of us. So I want to thank you.

Joan, thanks a million for being such an, I would say, adept and diplomatic moderator for everything that happened. I have to say I don’t know how you are still awake after coming in from the Philippines just 24 or 48 hours ago. I stand in awe of you.

On behalf of everyone here and everyone who will be influenced by everyone here in our understanding and reception of the encyclical, I want to thank the three of you. I want to especially thank you for reminding us that our work is just beginning.