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THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGION ON PUBLIC AWARENESS  
OF ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN EUROPE  
AND THE PACIFIC;  
A COMPARATIVE STUDY  
OF THE CATHOLIC CHRISTIAN CHURCHES  
IN POLAND AND FIJI\*\*

Many argue that climate change and environmental issues of this present day has been the direct or indirect result of man's greed and unsustainable use of natural resources. These extremities were made more intense after the industrial revolution and the introduction of a more mechanised developing economy. In all these changes happening today, getting the right stakeholders on board is crucial. The study honed in on Catholic parishioners' perceptions and aspirations on their church's stance towards environmental issues in the developing and developed countries, with interest of the Catholic churches in Poland and Fiji. Results show that various disparities occur in both countries mainly due to historical events, economical might, tradition, leadership and political affiliations. What is important for such studies in both situations is identifying the opportunities which can be learned from these complexities.

Keywords: religious institutions, environmental issues, climate change

**INTRODUCTION**

Empirical and social scientific research has been recently undertaken to understand how religious perspectives support or oppose the idea of whether environmental stewardship is a moral issue. Part of the great diversity of humankind is the many different religions and belief systems we have developed – Animism, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Taoism, and many more that explain our connection to nature and deities (Gardner 2010). In the Pacific context, spirituality and attitudes towards nature have a profound interconnectedness (Mayer and Frantz 2004) seeing that spiritual values help to explain emotional and aesthetic value to nature and express strong messages of environmental stewardship, this is also predominantly recognised in developing countries (Crabtree 2010; Handelman 1996).

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The proposed topic of this research has been addressed previously by numerous researchers in the fields of theology, anthropology and environmental sciences. The literature on the topic shows how the connection between religion and environmental concern and activism has led to divergent conclusions, with some studies finding negative effects of religious factors and others finding more positive outcomes. For instance (Shaiko 1987; Berry 2006; Biel and Nilsson 2005) argue how an intersection between religion and environmental conservation has been laden with discord, particularly from the middle ages up to present day, due to the anthropocentric views that dominate theology. Additionally, as (Sherkat and Ellison 2007; Peterson and Liu, 2008) illustrate, social science research shows that conservative Christians and members of the Christian right are typically less concerned about issues of environmentalism than the general public. However (Sherkat and Ellison 2007; Nunn et al. 2016) highlight how religious affiliation, participation and beliefs can have a positive influence on environmental concerns, and on private and political environmental activism.

A shared view amongst researchers highlights how some practises which are deemed unsustainable and detrimental to the natural environment have been justified by religious institutions in both developing and developed countries (Anderson et al. 2000; Shyan Fam et al. 2004; da Siveira 2015). These ideologies, although arising from Western and not traditional Pacific values, are appear to be condoned by Pacific Island church leaders, as illustrated by several case studies involving culling endangered species and other destructive developments (Maunder 2007; Maunder et al. 2007; Hand and Van Lier 1984; Olson 1997). Within central Europe, in Poland the majority of Poles are convinced about the Church's influence in various spheres of public life, including the political sphere. This view is predominant among almost two-thirds of adult Poles, but also among the youth (even to a somewhat greater extent). This means that the Church is perceived by part of Polish society as a quasi-political institution, or at least one that attempts to fulfil political functions (Marianiński 2017), so the scope is a bit different from that of the Pacific context. Nevertheless, although religious institutions are found to be heavily involved in altruistic efforts which are directly and indirectly associated with environmental conservation in many countries around the world (Praglin 2004; Greeley 1993) they can be powerful agents for positive change, to drive people to tangible actions towards effective resource management. Additionally (O'Connor et al. 1999; Viola 2004; Salehyan 2008; Beisner 2012) argue that environmental issues have become a major topic in the global arena, indicating growing public perception of a common threat which is faced by all, suggesting the need for influential partners such as churches to address these growing issues.

## RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODOLOGY

In Pacific Island countries, churches have considerable political and social influence that may be greater than in other parts of the world (Tomlinson and McDougall 2013). It is generally acknowledged that unsustainable practices that are harmful to the natural environment can be changed by raising public awareness to develop sustaining adaptive strategies. Religious institutions are an integral part of Pacific society and culture, and can influence

communities into making more informed decisions about environmental issues, and this holds true for Poles as well (Trzebiatowska 2010; Baniak 2012).

50 years ago in Europe the Catholic Church was a very influential and important institution (Jelen 2002). Additionally, in Western Europe public religiosity started to decline to low levels, with many assuming that this would be the eventual path that most countries would soon follow in the whole of the Western world. At the very least governments and politicians were expected to be freed from the influence of religious elites and citizens. Huntington (1996) argued that religion in the modern world is a central part of motivating and mobilising people in this world, although the relationship between the “the church” and the “the state” in present day society has not always been easy. Religion and its charters, in particular the Catholic Church, can be a source of political motivation and mobilization, but also the main cause of policy disputes which have taken place in many parts of the world with regards to social and environmental issues (Kulczycki 1995).

The preliminary literature review (above) shows that in other parts of the world, contemporary discourses are tending towards a perception that religion and spirituality in any form may be grounded in environmental moral values. For centuries, Biblical references have supported the view that God provided all things in the material world for the benefit of humankind. The question is to what extent does Christian teaching require stewardship of the earth’s resources? In Genesis 9:13 God tells Noah “I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth.” What is the difference of attitudes in connection to dominant or ‘competitive’ religious landscapes?

Religious institutions of the world, although influential in many facets of society, can play a more effective role towards environmental concerns. To be able to undertake this it is important to note that the communities and societies to be chosen to participate in this questionnaire were selected from different parts of Poland and Fiji, and depending on their locality small focus groups were interviewed, and their responses to a set questionnaire was analysed to see what similarities arose from these areas. Additionally the method incorporated was based primarily on observations of the experiences of local situations, together with insights gathered from discussions with the local people. This was a more effective way of exploring the depths of the reality of local experiences and expressions. Therefore a qualitative approach was used, centred on scholarly and peer reviewed journals, books, newspaper articles/clippings, audio/visual documentaries pertaining to the subject matter and in-depth interviews: *talanoa*<sup>1</sup> sessions with key informants from the religious institutions.

## AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this research was to study the teachings and contributions to public attitudes of religious institutions, namely the Catholic Church in Poland and Fiji, and to what extent the church perceives environmental stewardship as a moral issue. It will be centred on the

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<sup>1</sup> The Pacific term used to explain face-to-face talks with an individual or group of people; these sessions are either formal, semi-formal or informal depending on what the interviewer is trying to draw out from the interviewee(s).

following objectives: (1) To describe the environmental issues in Krakow and Suva (Fiji), (2) To investigate the Catholic Church's stance towards environmental issues through the clergy and its parishioners within the paradigm of church teachings and (3) To analyse the potential for religious institutions in Krakow and in the Pacific to influence political decision-making and community awareness of current environmental concerns.

#### CASE STUDY – FIJI ISLANDS AND ITS ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Fiji became independent in 1970, after nearly a century as a British colony. Democratic rule was interrupted by two military coups in 1987, caused by concern over a government perceived as dominated by the Indian community (descendants of contract labourers brought to the islands by the British in the 19th century). The coups and a 1990 constitution that cemented native Melanesian control of Fiji led to heavy Indian emigration; the population loss resulted in economic difficulties, but it ensured that Melanesians became the majority. A new constitution enacted in 1997 was more equitable. Free and peaceful elections in 1999 resulted in a government led by an Indo-Fijian, but a civilian-led coup in 2000 ushered in a prolonged period of political turmoil. Parliamentary elections held in 2001 provided Fiji with a democratically elected government led by Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase. Re-elected in May 2006, Qarase was ousted in a December 2006 military coup led by Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama, who initially appointed himself acting president but in January 2007 became interim prime minister. Following years of political turmoil, long-delayed legislative elections were held in September 2014 that were deemed “credible” by international observers and that resulted in Bainimarama being re-elected.

In terms of the major environmental issues which are affecting Fiji, they can be all strongly linked to climate change, both directly and indirectly. The country is now challenged by a range of environmental pressures resulting from the drivers of Fiji's economy. Pressures on their financial and natural resources include coastal erosion, salt water intrusion, land degradation, habitat destruction, invasive species, pollution, waste and many others, and many of these will be exacerbated by climate change. Natural phenomena occur in Fiji more frequently and with increasing intensity during the annual tropical cyclonic season, which occurs from the months of November to April. Other pressures were important in the recent past, such as nuclear testing. Some of these pressures have led to populations being relocated as was experienced in the early 1950s in Fiji.

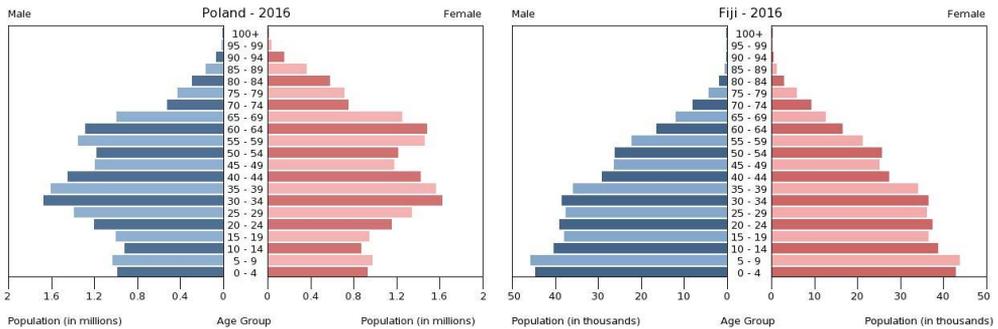
Fiji is also a signatory and part of the conference of parties on the following treaties: Biodiversity, Climate Change, Climate Change-Kyoto Protocol, Desertification, Endangered Species, and the Law of the Sea, Marine Life Conservation, Ozone Layer Protection, Tropical Timber 83, Tropical Timber 94, and Wetlands. These all have been ratified in the small island nation as well (CIA 2007).

#### POPULATION AND RELIGIOUS COMPOSITION

It is important to know that although Fiji can be considered a country where there is a higher number of people who gravitate to Christianity, as compared to Poland the country is in the majority a Protestant country, where Methodism makes up the dominant proportion

in the spectrum of Christian churches present in the country. In descending order from the largest to the smallest they are: Protestant 45% (Methodist 34.6%, Assembly of God 5.7%, Seventh Day Adventist 3.9%, and Anglican 0.8%), Hindu 27.9%, other Christian 10.4%, Roman Catholic 9.1%, Muslim 6.3%, Sikh 0.3%, other 0.3%, none 0.8% (2007 est.). Additionally, the population in Fiji, like all developing countries, has a broad base which shows a higher population of youth.

Figure 1 portrays the populations of both Fiji and Poland and how they differ in population composition and age.



**Figure 1.** Demographic pyramid showing which is typical for developing countries with a broad base, showing a higher number of a younger population and a beehive shape which is typical of more developed countries (Agency 2007)

## CASE STUDY – POLAND AND ITS ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Poland’s history as a state began near the middle of the 10th century. By the mid-16th century, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth ruled a vast tract of land in Central and Eastern Europe. During the 18th century, internal disorders weakened the nation, and in a series of agreements between 1772 and 1795, Russia, Prussia, and Austria partitioned Poland among themselves. Poland regained its independence in 1918 only to be overrun by Germany and the Soviet Union in World War II. It became a Soviet satellite state following the war, but its government was comparatively tolerant and progressive. Labour turmoil in 1980 led to the formation of the independent trade union “Solidarity” that over time became a political force with over 10 million members. Free elections in 1989 and 1990 won Solidarity control of the parliament and the presidency, bringing the communist era to a close. A “shock therapy” program during the early 1990s enabled the country to transform its economy into one of the most robust in Central Europe. Poland joined NATO in 1999 and the EU in 2004. With its transformation to a democratic, market-oriented country largely completed and with large investments in defence, energy, and other infrastructure, Poland is an increasingly active member of Euro-Atlantic organizations.

With regards to environmental issues in Poland, decreased emphasis on heavy industry and increased environmental concern by post-communist governments has improved the

environment; air pollution remains serious because of emissions from coal-fired power plants and the resulting acid rain has caused forest damage; water pollution from industrial and municipal sources is also a problem, as is disposal of hazardous wastes. This has been as such for the past four decades, and has worsened due to recent studies showing how air quality in some cities has been extremely poor for the residents and those in the neighbouring towns as well. Poland however, being one of the key players of the European Union is part of international agreements such as: Air Pollution, Antarctic-Environmental Protocol, Antarctic-Marine Living Resources, Antarctic Seals, Antarctic Treaty, Biodiversity, Climate Change, Climate Change-Kyoto Protocol, Desertification, Endangered Species, Environmental Modification, Hazardous Wastes, Law of the Sea, Marine Dumping, Ozone Layer Protection, Ship Pollution, and Wetlands. Additionally, those which have been signed by the government but not yet ratified include: Air Pollution-Nitrogen Oxides, Air Pollution-Persistent Organic Pollutants, and Air Pollution-Sulfur 94. Many of these agreements gravitate towards air pollution.

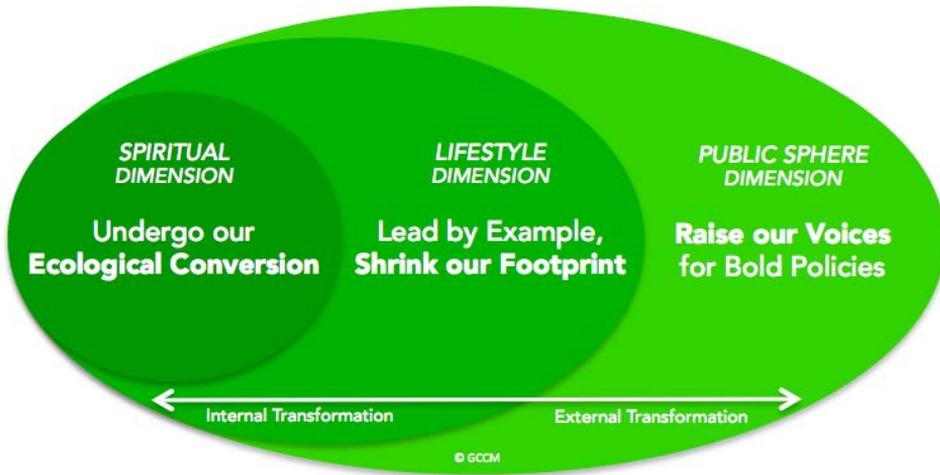
#### POPULATION AND RELIGIOUS COMPOSITION

Poland can be classified as a predominantly Catholic, with the majority of its population recognising themselves as belonging to the Catholic faith. Within Poland itself the breakdown is seen as 87.2% (includes Roman Catholic 86.9% and Greek Catholic, Armenian Catholic, and Byzantine-Slavic Catholic .3%), Orthodox 1.3% (almost all are Polish Autocephalous Orthodox), Protestant 0.4% (mainly Augsburg Evangelical and Pentacostal), other 0.4% (includes Jehovah's Witness, Buddhist, Hare Krishna, Gaudiya Vaishnavism, Muslim, Jewish, Mormon), unspecified 10.8% (2012 est.).

#### BIBLICAL REFERENCES AND APPROACH OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH TO ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

The Global Catholic Climate Movement (GCCM) serves the Catholic family worldwide, working to turn Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* encyclical into action for climate justice, by undergoing our own ecological conversion, transforming our lifestyles and calling for bold public policies together with the wider climate movement (refer to Figure 2). Founded in January 2015, it is a coalition of over 400 Catholic member organizations in all continents with a constituency of nearly 1 million Catholic individuals, guided by an international Steering Committee and a secretariat based in Boston. The diverse membership reflects the diversity of the Catholic Church: Caritas agencies, religious orders, lay movements, youth groups, diocesan offices and Catholic-inspired NGOs are members of GCCM.

The GCCM's work is led by: 1) a Steering Committee of member organizations that steers the strategic direction and programs, 2) a Board of Directors that oversees governance and financial matters, 3) a Secretariat that implements the strategic plan and programs, and 4) a global network of Member Organizations that mobilizes the Catholic community around the globe. The Catholic institution can be seen as the forerunner in setting up the major environmental events through the church for others around the world belonging to the church. The framework to work under follows a three-dimensional approach to tackle the complicated and complexities of climate change in different countries. These are susceptible to adaptability in different national contexts to fulfil the overall goals.



**Figure 2.** The 3-step approach undertaken by the Catholic Church in approach to climate change for parishes to follow. Such teachings have been inculcated into theological teachings as well (Francesco 2015)

**Table 1.** These three dimensions are spiritual, lifestyle and public policy. Adapted (GCCM 2018)

Spiritual dimension	Lifestyle dimension	Public policy dimension
To promote <i>Laudato Si'</i> and encourage local communities to undergo the 'ecological conversion' needed to overcome consumerism and heal our relationship with creation and the poor; the Season of Creation is the flagship project	To encourage lifestyle changes through the Eco-Parish program to reduce the carbon footprint from Catholic parishes worldwide and the Divest-Reinvest program to shift Catholic financial assets from dirty fossil fuels to clean renewable energy	To raise our voice in the public sphere to call for bold climate policies, by mobilizing in the streets, supporting advocacy efforts in the halls of power and amplifying the <i>Laudato Si'</i> message in the media
<i>The papal call to action:</i> "We must therefore encourage and support the 'ecological conversion' which has made humanity more sensitive to the catastrophe to which it has been heading" (St John Paul II)	<i>The papal call to action:</i> "Humanity is called to recognize the need for changes of lifestyle; production and consumption, in order to combat these warming and highly polluting fossil fuels need to be progressively replaced without delay" (Pope Francis, LS 23, 165)	<i>The papal call to action:</i> "The Church has a responsibility towards creation and she must assert this responsibility in the public sphere... She must above all protect mankind from self-destruction" (Pope Benedict XVI, Caritas in Veritate 51)
<i>GCCM's goal:</i> to enable an ecological conversion of the Catholic faithful, a "change of heart" that can motivate an integral ecology and a more passionate concern for God's creation	<i>GCCM's goal:</i> to help the Catholic family lead by example and dramatically shrink its collective carbon footprint	<i>GCCM's goal:</i> to raise a loud and prophetic voice critiquing the "unlimited growth" paradigm and calling for bold policies to advance 100% renewable energy

“*Laudato si*” creed structure can be a major turning point, the moment when environmentalism claimed pride of place on a par with the dignity of human life and economic justice as a cornerstone of Catholic social teaching. It also immediately makes the Catholic Church arguably the leading moral voice in the press to combat global warming and the consequences of climate change. What is important to understand is that many sociologists and political scientists have emphasized the ability of dominant religions to ensure social consensus and to provide an uncontested web of social and spiritual meaning for to the citizens” (Francesco 2015; Francis 2015).

## METHODOLOGY

A series of 10 questions centred on issues of environment, politics and religion were distributed to participants in both countries. These were all semi-formal interviews and focus group discussions. Two of the ten questions were structured as closed-ended, and the remaining eight were open-ended for interviewees to express their views and perceptions.

The survey was conducted with upper high school students 13 years and over of which there were 26 in total from both countries, and with university students, university teachers, clerics, and civil and non-governmental workers. One thing in common was that majority of the respondents affiliated themselves with practising the Catholic faith, with only three who were Protestant.

## LIMITATIONS TO THE RESEARCH

This research was a rapid assessment carried out over a ten-week period, therefore some of the constraints included a short timeline to carry out this research and if this had been for a longer period of time more substantial and in-depth discussions and other factors could have been covered comprehensively. However the author had to make good use of the time given. Additionally, the author was not a native speaker of the Polish language which posed a challenge and much of the fieldwork was done with the help of an interpreter.

## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

In regards to the question “*What are the main principles of your organisation/institution in relation to environmental stewardship?*” answers varied depending on where the interviewee affiliation was from (refer to Table 2).

In both Poland and Fiji students had a stronger personal convictions on how important the environment was, but saw that in a major aspect the directors of their schools or university did not in any way have strong advocacy for environmental stewardship or green programs. When asked to elaborate on whether their schools had initiatives of recycling and if these were some of the practises which they saw fellow colleagues take part in, the clear response was that there was a lot of awareness, but there were still the careless actions of others who did not bother with or show any concern for their surroundings and environment. The concept of stewardship seen here is that a lot of people knew about it and what it entailed, but not everyone enforced these practises, and a majority of the responses were keen on pollution

issues and consumerism. A commonality which emerged from those who fell under the Civil servant sector, NGOs and CSOs was that they had some approach or element of environmental practices which was present in their working areas; these were mainly to do with solid, liquid and e-waste management initiatives, which are a new trend arising in the past 5–10 years. In some of these firms green certification was a priority too, as a means to show more publicly that they were really taking on such initiatives linked to global initiatives of the Sustainable Millennium Goals. The practice was seen as a major incentive to attract more clientele and have more unique and competitive edge over others in the same mainstream of work. Within cloisters of those within the theological background there were initiatives already in place with regards to solid waste disposal and forestry and gardening (on personal levels as well as on an institutional scale). What stood out was a strong sense among the respondents who worked within the religious institutions or who were of the clergy shared how within theological colleges the broad topics of anthropology, theology of creation and integral ecology was inculcated into the seminary tutelage. This was a common understanding in both countries, as the main curriculum was universalized and adapted to suit the contexts of both Poland and Fiji. There was a stronger bio-centric understanding from the interviewees from Fiji, seeing that all respondents provided some ecclesiastical and culturally significant connection to support their answers and a higher inclusion in the natural community of life. In Poland answers tended towards a larger portion of altruistic and egocentric understandings supported by ecclesiastical examples.

**Table 2.** Shows the breakdown of participants in the survey

Poland		Fiji	
General Affiliation	#	General Affiliation	#
High School	13	High School	10
University (Student)	19	University (Student)	29
University (Teacher)	6	University (Teacher)	9
Clergy	5	Clergy	8
Civil Servant	6	Civil Servant	7
NGO	2	NGO	4
CSO	3	CSO	4
TOTAL	54		71
TOTAL # of Participants	125		

In regards to the question “*Are environmental issues important in this day and age?*” responses from both countries showed that there was great concern and indeed it is in need of much attention. All the participants who were interviewed had a great wealth of knowledge of how environmental issues was an important issue for the church to address in this day and age. They shared a lot of anecdotal evidence of climate change impacts in their various settings.

In answering the question “*What is the future potential of religious teaching and leadership to shape environmental awareness at the political level and in public awareness?*” again a majority of the respondents agreed that the church does have an influential role to play, seeing it is a highly respected institution, although at the levels of mobilizing people it would be a more safer approach to have this done at social levels, as in the political arena there is a more paradigm shift to secular approaches of running a country and there was a need for major institutions to tread lightly, as there has been controversial publicity which has tainted the reputation of the institution in the past for both countries. This was the main view expressed from both countries.

#### SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE FIJI ISLANDS AND POLAND

In the case of Fiji it was noted that in some cases the traditional spiritual practices are still conducted within the new *Laudato Si'* framework of the church, and some theologians have worked to indigenize the faith, developing an ‘oceanic’ theology appropriate for a ‘liquid continent’ with the sea taking the place of the Old Testament Hebrew relationship to the land (Haluza-DeLay 2014; Taylor et al. 2016). This use of hermeneutic approaches was a common practice for Fijian clergy and is common within many Pacific Islanders involved in eco-theological work with their parishes. This is done to contextualize complex environmental issues for the common people. In the case of Poland the use of hermeneutic approaches is rather secondary and things tend to be addressed or expressed unambiguously for eco-theological work.

In terms of social organization, disaster and climate change specialists frequently report that churches play a significant role in cultures and authority systems of local communities in the Pacific, and they should be included in planning, education, and mobilization. The presence of churches in every community in the Fiji Islands fosters responses to island disasters better than a national government perceived as distant. However, the majority of churches are mainly Protestant (Methodist), and Catholicism can be found in the same places as Protestant churches as well. Their material resources are available for use, and they provide a place for gathering and communication. They facilitate social capital in certain circumstances, although in other circumstances, faith-based competition can undermine disaster response and climate adaptation.

Catholicism within Poland shows greater support for the Catholic Church, at over 85% (Borowski 1985) and the church played a crucial role in the demise of communism in Poland in efforts for national liberalization and social justice (Burdziej 2005; Porter-Szucs 2011) with the charismatic leadership of a Pope from Poland, who arguably mobilized people to rally to the breakup of the communist bloc in Central and Eastern Europe (Chrypinski 1989). Over the centuries, Catholicism has adapted to the national political cultures of the people where necessary. This is true in particularity the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, where the Vatican councils provided theological rationales for a political flexibility on the part of national Catholic churches, while still asserting the infallibility of the pope in matters of faith and social morals. There is now a more pluralistic shift of church dogma to local political cultures which can be seen from the questionnaires which were distributed in Poland. It seems when the

hegemony of a dominant religious tradition can be challenged by competitors seeking a more legal autonomy or equality, the theoretical model of pluralism suggests that there will be many inactive citizens in non-competitive environments (Jelen and Wilcox 2002). However, it can be seen that in Poland there is a great amount of knowledge amongst the clergy and youth actively involved in church activities that are aware of what the church is doing in terms of environmental work, but this percentage is still relatively low compared to Fiji. More active participation from parishes and from an ecclesiastical approach still needs to build momentum.

PERIMETERS USED FOR COUNTRY COMPARISONS  
TOWARDS ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

In terms of environmental awareness in faith groups, four types of barriers exist: paradigmatic barriers, applicability barriers, inadequate social critique, and barriers of conviction (Haluza-DeLay 2008; Berkes 2004). The *paradigmatic barriers* are theological beliefs or world-views that disable environmental concern, such as an imminent end-times theology, a common context now with many different schools of thought taking varied points of views. Next are *applicability barriers*, which include the level of attention paid to environmental concerns, that is, the application of efforts to them, especially when compared to issues like hunger or economic development in the face of poverty, and is a major concern to many developing countries as to where to access funds and where to allocate them appropriately. Then there is *inadequate social critique* which comes as a barrier in that a faith group may not recognize the problem as a social one (rather than rooted in individual or immoral behaviour such as greed); the consequence is failure to acknowledge deeper roots of the problem and derive sufficient solutions. Finally, the *barrier of conviction* is a category that includes such factors as lack of knowledge or motivation to act, or attachment to current lifestyles mainly linked to consumerism.

These perimeters were adopted from works of Haluza-DeLay (2008) and Berkes (2004) because they can be categorised in three groupings – and best represented the results from these two countries. Category 1: subcultural (social practices of faith communities that may lead to more effective learning), Category 2: commitment (sense of responsibility, duty, and desire to follow through on religious commitment), and Category 3: public theology (facets that aid constructive engagement with the public discourse). These paradigms are present in both Fiji and Poland, as they have undergone dramatic events and changes over history which have led to people’s view of how involved religious institutions are in seeing environmental issues as a moral issue, as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Summary of groupings

Country	Categories		
	Subcultural	Commitment	Public Theology
Fiji	– Applicability Barriers	– Applicability Barriers	– Applicability Barriers – Barrier Of Conviction
Poland	– Paradigmatic Barriers	– Applicability Barriers	– Inadequate Social Critique Barriers

Both countries have faced severe hardships in different forms within the political, economic and social arenas, and these do have an impact on the responses and knowledge about the subject matter. Poland showed expression and concern that environmentalism may be founded on nature worship or other aberrant belief systems (old Slavic traditions) but again this varied from rural to urban responses – although more emphasis was placed on humanistic and societal development. In Fiji great emphasis was given to the applicability barriers from the respondents; a breakdown summary and significant notes can be seen in Table 4.

**Table 4.** A summary of the responses from questions from Poland and Fiji

Survey questions	Areas of interest	
	Poland	Fiji
What role does religion play in politics in relation to the Environment?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Periphery responses differed from those in the city 50/50</li> <li>– Responses from older and younger generations differed 50/50</li> <li>– Clergy acknowledged, in past the Church was more involved in political matters.</li> <li>– No role to play – focus is on spiritual and family well-being</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Both periphery and urban areas strongly agree that religion has a big influence in politics – decision making in policies concerning land, water and housing.</li> <li>– Involved role – (whether it be Christianity/Hindu/Islam)</li> </ul>
Do pastors/ministers/priests play a crucial role in society in this modern day and age? (yes/no)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Periphery (agreement) / urban (disagreement) 50/50</li> <li>– Many are now moving away from the church – becoming more agnostic/atheistic/uninterested due to many legalistic practises.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Yes very much</li> <li>– Important pillars in communities/meetings and governmental meetings.</li> </ul>
To what extent do the churches influence public policy and law in the country?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Confused</li> <li>– Not sure but there is some influence but minuscule</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Contradicting their own teachings</li> <li>– Cultural conflicts</li> </ul>
To what extent does the church see environmental issues as moral issues?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The interest is only there, according to the order/spiritual leader within the community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Moral because it directly affects the people</li> <li>– Other denominations must get involved/ different faith groups need to work together on the matter</li> </ul>
Is teaching on environmental stewardship included in theological education?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– No, and it has never been brought up</li> <li>– Is interesting but not taught</li> <li>– Clergy acknowledge that it is integrated into teachings</li> <li>– Very few know if it is</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Yes it is part of teachings</li> <li>– Strong agreement that the curriculum has changed due to climate change</li> </ul>
What are the prevailing theological discourses on the relationship between man and the natural environment?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Man subdues the Earth</li> <li>– Teachings are to look after the Earth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Close relationship between both</li> <li>– Greed has changed views</li> </ul>

As seen in Table 4, in Poland many people asserted that human social concerns take priority over environmental issues, and in some cases from interviewees individualized spirituality holds strong sway in a modernist world wherein religious faith is to be private and personal. It is interesting as well because this pietistic form of worship in urban areas especially is linked to a paradigmatic obstacle mentioned above, and is similar to a study undertaken on the Polish diaspora in the UK (Trzebiatowska 2010) and as seen in Poland as well: Poles may elevate cultural values to the status of the religious message. For instance, viewing the environment solely as a resource for human utilization is part of a Western cultural world view and interpreting scripture or understanding one's experience and values is affected by historical, social and cultural factors. Thus, development of a cultural critique is vital for sound religious education, and this style can be seen in Poland, as others have also pointed out (Inglehart and Siemienicka 1988; Korbonski 2000).

What can be seen is the attitudes of today's Polish Catholics towards the Church, in reference to the outcome of sociological research in this matter and that of others, notably that of Baniak (2011). The most difficult part of the adaptation process of the Church and clergy is the socio-cultural reality started by the changes at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup>. Following the Second World War and the collapse of Communism completely new conditions of living emerged in Poland, as Poles gained freedom and political independence. These changes significantly influenced their attitudes towards the Church and clergy in the parishes, as more people's attitudes became more critical and unconstrained than was evident in the time of socialism (Kaminski 2014). What can be seen from those times and from the interviews is that Poles have become more religiously independent, and repudiate the moral guidelines of the Church (especially those regarding sexual ethics and family life (Pietrzak and Mikołajczak 2011)). The number of Catholics who disbelieve the priests and criticize the hypocrisy and immoral behaviour of the clergy has increased. The deepest critique comes from young people, especially regarding the political involvement of the Church, the pseudo-celibacy of priests and monks, as well the compulsory religion lessons in schools.

However it is the exact opposite for a developing country like Fiji, which shows a greater concern for the environment and where the church is actually ensuring that cluster cell networks in districts and provinces through the islands educate people about these matters. The Catholic Church in Fiji has been working closely with NGOs and various faith-based organizations to tackle this problem in the region. The barrier of conviction is not evident in Fiji, due to their 'subcultural' practices: congregations encourage self-reflection, confession of mistakes, application of moral principles to everyday behaviour, and the social expectations of listening to others, discussion and being challenged. Theological lessons and masses are expected to be directly applicable to the personal lives of Pacific people, rather than abstract, thus the major use of hermeneutical approaches. Many of these reasons are little different in a church context than in other contexts. These obstacles include one's current standard of living, willingness to make changes, motivation to act, level of knowledge, awareness of action strategies and other factors.

A bigger opportunity may persist in both countries, as motivational opportunities appear to be able to fill the gaps. This is a dimension that potentially could increase the effectiveness of environmental awareness because of the faith-based commitment. In order to do this in

both countries, first participants should be able to identify and express a desire to “do the right thing” even in the face of countervailing cultural norms, and therefore seek to discern what that “right thing” might be. Second, a sense of duty or obligation can support desire. Feeling responsible to God-Creator could be a powerful incentive to pro-environmental concern: when the subject is presented this dimension, it thus falls back to the *Laudato Si'* initiative mandated globally for Catholic parishes to follow. However, participants expressed the desire and sense of duty to apply faith-based, environmental awareness in their lifestyles (and this is something privately expressed and not something which is needed to be expressed publicly). This happens to be the main ideology shared by both countries, yet when asked about the successes, participants in both countries often expressed how difficult it was to make environmental choices. It is this motivational dimension that could tighten the gap.

## CONCLUSION

The most significant gaps in the scholarly review are caused by a lack of comparative research into the thematic area of religion and environmental stewardship. What the research has tried to establish was how people are motivated within their Catholic conclaves towards environmental stewardship. The research reveals religious engagement with climate change varies, but without good, nuanced comparisons that account for lived practice of everyday religiosity situated within even broader contexts, we can see that ‘here this was what happened; there is what occurred’. What can be learned from such case studies between developing and developed countries are the disparities which exist as well as the similarities in the attitudes of parishioners.

Additionally, the research provides insight into isolated societies and their perceptions in regards to religions institutional influence toward environmental stewardship, using perimeters for the basis of comparisons undertaken in Poland and Fiji. What is imperative to see is that there is a higher tendency towards religiosity in more developing countries as compared to those which are developed. However, for a small country like Fiji the trends in which the Catholic Church is taking and its influence on the people are becoming similar to those of Poland as well. Moreover this can only be verified by more qualitative and quantitative research over a prolonged period of time.

The research carried out showed there was higher concern with environmental issues centred around parishes which were more proactive in their stance towards addressing environmental issues within their congregation in the developing countries like that of Fiji as developing countries have a greater vulnerability to climatic and environmental changes. Additionally, the term ‘environment’ has much broader connotations than just nature to the peoples of Fiji. The natural environment is an integral part of their culture, tradition, history and way of life, as compared to a more westernised concept in more developed countries. In the developed country of Poland however, there is a stronger pull towards the applicability barrier, resulting in more emphasis placed on social or humanistic needs than on environmental issues (although present, it was not as substantial as was found in Fiji). Cultural and political interactions affect the way religious groups operate and perpetuate religious cosmologies in the broader society, as well as among its adherents. Perhaps the creation of many case studies

on many scales and deploying differing methodologies with their concomitant advantages can affect a broader theory of religious engagement with human-induced climate change. What is clear is that a better understanding at the level of local faith communities is needed in order to understand what influences climate-positive behaviour. Discussions on the position and role of the Catholic Church in society are continuing, and have yet to reach any conclusive diagnosis, especially regarding our understanding and acceptance of a “model Church” functioning in a pluralistic society. As Mariański stated this is an area of research which sociologists and those engaged in Social sciences or religious studies are trying to answer. Moreover, modern governments of all types provide a range of services and protections, and the scope of their activities is unprecedented in the history of the world. One of the main challenges which governments face is a question of which religious beliefs to support and to encourage, and which ones to regulate or even prohibit, and how to do so. For environmental work in church-based contexts to be effective as an agent of change, it must respect the churches’ traditions (both scripture and history) and culture. Environmental work in church-based contexts must also engage the members in critical analysis of their understandings of their faith’s responsibilities under contemporary social and environmental conditions, attending to the particular manifestations of obstacles and opportunities such as those presented above. But the potential of this powerful source of moral and social persuasion should not be overlooked in seeking to fan the green fire towards a more ecologically aware society.

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WPLYW RELIGII NA ŚWIADOMOŚĆ SPOŁECZNĄ ZAGADNIEŃ ŚRODOWISKOWYCH  
W EUROPIE I NA PACYFIKU.

STUDIUM PORÓWNAWCZE KATOLICKICH KOŚCIOŁÓW CHRZEŚCIJAŃSKICH  
W POLSCE I NA FIDŻI

Zdaniem wielu naukowców zmiany klimatu i problemy środowiskowe w dzisiejszych czasach są bezpośrednim lub pośrednim wynikiem ludzkiej chciwości i niezrównoważonego wykorzystania zasobów naturalnych. Zjawiska te stały się intensywniejsze po rewolucji przemysłowej i wprowadzeniu bardziej zmechanizowanej rozwijającej się gospodarki. We wszystkich tych zmianach, które mają miejsce dzisiaj, kluczowe jest zaangażowanie odpowiednich interesariuszy. Celem przedstawionych w artykule analiz było ukazanie percepcji katolików oraz postawy Kościoła wobec kwestii środowiskowych w krajach rozwijających się i rozwiniętych. Badania objęły kościoły katolickie w Polsce i na Fidżi. Wyniki pokazują, że w obu krajach występują różnice, głównie ze względu na wydarzenia historyczne, siłę gospodarczą, tradycję, przywództwo i powiązania polityczne. Ważne w obu sytuacjach jest określenie możliwości, które tkwią w podejściu katolików i Kościoła katolickiego wobec zmian zachodzących w klimacie.

Słowa kluczowe: instytucje religijne, problemy środowiskowe, zmiany klimatu