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"There are no frontiers or barriers, political or social, behind which we can hide"
(LS 52)

Borders, Christian Social Ethics, and the Legacy of *Laudato si'*

Abstract
The topic of international borders intersects with the moral vision of the encyclical *Laudato si'* (LS) in three ways: as challenge, as revelation of some key oversights, and as opportunity for application and refinement. As an exercise in Christian social ethics (CSE), this essay surveys these forms of intersection between international borders and the moral vision of *Laudato si'* (LS) via a fourfold taxonomy for representing borders – experiential (3.1), systemic (3.2), metaphorical (3.3), and methodological (3.4) – which is ordered from concrete to abstract. On this basis, it becomes possible to pinpoint each type of borders-LS intersection at distinct levels: borders-as-challenge (levels 1–2), borders-as-revelation-of-oversights (levels 2–3), and borders-as-opportunity (levels 3–4). This undertaking generates strategies for engaging the moral vision of LS together with borders; it also raises promising implications for borders as integral to the methodology of CSE itself.

Zusammenfassung
Das Thema internationale Grenzen steht in dreierlei Hinsicht mit der moralischen Vision der Enzyklika *Laudato si'* (LS) in Zusammenhang: als etwas, das LS herausfordert, das deren Leerstellen offenlegt und das Chancen zur deren Weiterentwicklung ermöglicht. Um diesen Zusammenhang in sozialethischer Perspektive näher analysieren zu können, werden vier unterschiedliche Zugänge zum Thema Grenzen – vom Konkreten zum Abstrakten – entwickelt: erfahrungsbasiert (3.1), systematisch (3.2), metaphorisch (3.3) und methodisch (3.4). Auf diese Weise kann anschließend deren Beziehung zur moralischen Vision von LS auf drei Ebenen herausgearbeitet werden: Grenzen als Herausforderung (Ebene 1–2), Grenzen als Offenbarung von Leerstellen (Ebene 2–3) und Grenzen als Chance (Ebene 3–4). Gleichzeitig skizziert der Beitrag erste Impulse, wie die Disziplin Christliche Sozialethik konzeptionell von einem methodischen Zugang an das Thema Grenzen profitieren kann.

1 Introduction

The apostolic exhortation *Laudate Deum* (LD), Pope Francis's 2023 follow-up to the landmark 2015 encyclical *Laudato si'* (LS), is revealing in at least two ways. First, it is an admission of failure. Looking back over the period since LS was first released, its text states, "[O]ur responses have

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not been adequate, while the world in which we live is collapsing and may be nearing the breaking point" (LD 2). This statement refers not merely to the accumulating evidence of human-caused climate change, but also to the insufficient impact of LS itself. Second, relative to its predecessor, *Laudate Deum* expresses a changed and altogether more pessimistic view of the international situation. In its third section, entitled "The Weakness of International Politics", the document displays a willingness to "reconfigure and recreate" rather than "saving the old multilateralism" (LD 37). This differs from the call in LS to "devise stronger and more efficiently organized international institutions" (LS 175). It is the core claim of this essay that when it comes to thinking clearly and constructively about both of these points – the insufficient response to LS and the task of rethinking international relations – a valuable and neglected resource bears highlighting: international borders.

This claim may seem surprising. As the encyclical states, "[T]here are no frontiers or barriers, political or social, behind which we can hide, still less is there room for the globalization of indifference" (LS 52). Does that not suggest a papal position that questions, on moral grounds, the significance of borders, perhaps even their very reality? In terms of the position that LS seems to take, such an interpretation may be accurate. As a representation of the state of the world, however, it is not. Borders are not just stubbornly real as facts of concrete or metal, objects of political debate, or matters of life and death for those who seek to cross them. They are also capable of being represented as an analytically fruitful form of differentiation that combats precisely the *globalization of indifference* that LS inveighs against. To reinterpret borders in this way is to rethink how LS can be engaged and applied a decade after its release.

This essay unfolds across three steps. First, it distinguishes three ways that the topic of borders interacts with LS: (a) as a challenge to its moral vision; (b) as a revelation of gaps in its diagnoses of social and ecological challenges; (c) as an opportunity for rethinking social and ecological relations within concrete contexts. Second, it demonstrates how borders can be analyzed across four distinct categories – experiential, systemic, metaphorical, and methodological – that can be vertically ordered from concrete to abstract. Third, it applies its fourfold taxonomy to locate and clarify each type of borders-LS intersection. The result is a clearer and more coherent picture of the relationship between borders and LS, which has the potential to support further inquiries and applications. The essay's conclusion also speculates as to how Christian social ethics

(henceforth CSE) interacts with the study of borders, the implication being that borders are not simply a topic of moral concern but potentially vital to social-ethical methodology.

2 Overview

There are three ways that the topic of borders intersects with LS.

First, borders can be seen as a direct *challenge* to the encyclical's moral vision. The core of this vision is integral ecology, which has been framed by Vincent Miller (2017, 11) "as an understanding that interconnection is the essence of reality, as a way of seeing that can perceive interconnections among humans and the rest of creation, and as a moral principle for acting in harmony with them". In spite of various debates[1] regarding integral ecology's applicability in practice, social and political context, or grounding within the encyclical tradition, the text of the encyclical itself is relatively straightforward as to its basic meaning: "Everything is connected" (LS 91). That this principle also entails a core link between social and ecological justice is clear. As the very next sentence within the text states, "Concern for the environment thus needs to be joined to a sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society" (LS 91). Given the propensity of borders to divide humans from each other and alienate humans from more-than-human environments, one can see how borders challenge this aspect of the encyclical. Systemically and specifically, borders are as blunt a reminder as one can find that *our common home* is decidedly lacking in common ground.

Second, borders can be shown to reveal an important *gap* in the encyclical's assessment of the contemporary world situation. The term "border" appears exactly twice in the English version of the text (LS 71, 177), and in neither of these cases is much importance attributed to the idea of borders as such. To make this point is not to overlook the encyclical's many virtues when it comes to capturing urgent challenges eloquently, gaining public attention, and reimagining the ecological dimension within Catholic social thought. To suspect an oversight in the encyclical's

1 For an overview of many aspects of the encyclical, including integral ecology, see the first chapter, The World of *Laudato si´*, of the author's *Our Common, Bordered Home: Laudato si´ and the Promise of an Integrated Migration-Ecological Ethics* (Slater 2024, 3–30).

diagnoses is not to say that the diagnoses are wrong, just that they may be missing something. Given that the years since the release of LS in 2015 have not only been marked by a general hardening of borders, but also by such continuing trends as a rise in populism, the securitization of migration, and the failure of many nations to fulfill their environmental commitments as pledged in the Paris Agreement, it bears asking whether something vital might be missing from its perspective. The issue of borders is one such missing piece.

Third, borders can be enlisted on behalf of the moral vision of LS, as well as that of the CSE projects that might seek to refine, strengthen, or apply this vision. In this respect, borders are an *opportunity*. This is not simply a matter of highlighting specific cases of border-related social or ecological injustice, or even highlighting the role of borders in morally-significant political, ecological, or economic systems. Borders metonymize complex combinations of identity and alterity in ways that bear fruit for applying the moral vision of LS within concrete situations. In other words, borders function not just as material objects but also as a way of representing relationships among ideas. With regard to LS, the opportunity for borders to enrich the encyclical's conviction that everything is connected unfolds across two steps: first, by complementing connection with the distinctions that borders metonymize, and second, by embedding these dynamics within specific contexts.

Given that the present inquiry is itself an example of CSE engagement with LS, it bears asking: What is the role of the discipline of CSE in regard to these three types of borders-LS intersection? One can distinguish moral and intellectual dimensions to this question. In moral terms, a set of commitments is relatively straightforward. Insofar as LS represents a good-faith effort to promote social and environmental justice within a common project, CSE has a role to play in helping respond to the challenge of borders, fill in the gaps that borders reveal, and build on whatever opportunities borders represent. In intellectual terms, the picture for CSE in terms of LS and borders is more complex. That borders are at once objects of moral concern and resources for analysis makes them uniquely relevant to ethics. The idea thus arises that, relative to CSE, borders may not be external to the discipline's anchoring methodological commitments but also embedded alongside them. This idea carries vital – and, I think, promising – implications for understanding the discipline in a time of widespread and hardening borders. These implications are revisited in the essay's conclusion.

The following section presents and surveys a taxonomy for representing borders that is composed of four categories – experiential, systemic, metaphorical, and methodological. This taxonomy, which is based on a multidisciplinary engagement with the literature on borders, is justified purely through the insights it reveals and the subsequent inquiries it supports, not on commitments internal to CSE or LS. Nevertheless, although neither LS nor CSE is intrinsic to the taxonomy, both benefit from being considered in relation to it. In terms of LS, the taxonomy's levels provide a structure for mapping the three ways that borders intersect with LS. As for CSE, the bearing of borders on CSE in terms of each of the taxonomy's four levels will be sketched in the essay's conclusion.

3 Surveying the taxonomy

As "polysemic" (Balibar 2002, 81), borders signify different things in different contexts. They can also signify meaning in different ways. For present purposes, an essential insight is the recognition that the understanding of borders can be organized across four distinct levels. Ordered vertically from concrete to abstract – bottom to top, respectively – these levels are the experiential, systemic, metaphorical, and methodological. The levels just named are distinct, but not absolutely so, as each is consistent with the etymology of the word *border*, which stems from the Saxon word for "that which binds", or a "place of friction or meeting where alterity is negotiated" (Amilhat Szary 2015, 2). So understood, the term *border* functions as a kind of structured difference, which entails a two-sidedness and relevance to the political that is lacking in some of its English-language synonyms, such as *frontier*, *boundary*, *limit*, *terminus*, *threshold*, or *limen*.[2]

2 The term *border* is fundamentally two-sided and paradigmatically political, yet also applicable to other domains in the form of a metaphor. This differs from synonyms such as *frontier* (primarily political but not two-sided), *threshold* or *limen* (two-sided but not primarily political), *terminus* (neither two-sided nor political), or *limit* or *boundary* (not tethered to any specific side of these distinctions). While *border* presents an ethically significant contrast with *frontier*, its relationships with the other terms are more flexible, even if sometimes contested. For reasons of consistency and specificity, *border* is this essay's term of choice, even as *boundary* and *liminal* (the adjectival form of *limen*) are occasionally enlisted as a means of establishing connections with valuable scholarship (cf. Heimbach-Steins 2016; Faggioli 2020; Rockström et al. 2020).

As to how these categories interact, their relations are analytically multidirectional (both up and down) and logically unidirectional (from concrete to abstract). The more abstract levels draw out general impulses and insights, whilst the more concrete levels embed the abstract in specific cases. Moreover, the comparatively abstract levels are logically entirely dependent on those that are comparatively concrete. It would be impossible, in other words, to interpret borders *methodologically* were they not amenable to being interpreted *metaphorically*, a mode of analysis that depends on their being meaningful *systemically*, which, in turn, depends upon the borders' capacity to be significant *experientially*.

3.1 Level one: Experiential

To understand borders experientially is to interrogate how spaces are encountered directly within concrete contexts. Signified at the most commonsense level by maps, borders as experienced are actually quite contrary to anything cartographic. Unlike the representations of borders on maps, borders understood experientially are messy rather than clean, dynamic rather than static, and blended rather than unitary. No two borders are the same as they are actually experienced, and one can never cross the same border twice. Although there is extensive border-studies literature on specific borders as cases of academic or general interest, the experiential character of borders as experienced remains elusive. Notable exceptions aside (cf. De León 2015; Agier 2016), the experiential character of borders typically lends itself more suitably to first-hand testimonials and poetic storytelling (cf. Zamorra 2022) than academic analysis. This dimension of borders is a reminder of their stubborn reality. It also speaks to the specificity of border spaces experienced by those seeking to cross them.

3.2 Level two: Systemic

To investigate borders systemically is to probe how they both express and shape forces whose systemic reach extends far beyond any specific border environment. This dimension of borders gets at something else fundamental about them, which is that they are constitutively semiotic. If they did not signify something to someone in some way, they would

have no meaning as borders. Unsurprisingly, it is in their systemic dimension that borders have generated the highest level of scholarly interest. Among the many systems in which borders participate, of particular importance are those that link borders with political norms and practices (cf. Brown 2010), international migration (cf. Nida-Rümelin 2017), economic exchange (cf. Sassen 2006), colonial/postcolonial structures (cf. Mignolo 2012), and more-than-human climatic and biological systems (cf. Youatt 2020). A key point at this level of borders analysis is that borders do not simply interact with such systems; they also represent them. In fact, borders in this sense possess the odd quality of being both *exceptional to* and *emblematic of* systems that exist elsewhere.

3.3 Level three: Metaphorical

To investigate borders metaphorically is to examine not only how they lend themselves to description by way of metaphors, whether as walls (cf. Bissonette/Vallet 2021), wounds (cf. Anzaldúa 2007), flows (cf. Nail 2016), or even punctuation marks such as "/" (cf. Salter 2012). It is also to examine how borders are themselves metaphorized, such that their meaning is extended beyond the political-territorial domain by which they are typically understood. This is not the same as linking borders with other categories systemically; rather, what is distinctive about using the term *border* metaphorically is that some other context beyond the political or territorial is being identified as a site of negotiated alterity/structured difference in a manner that bears some meaningful similarity to the political-territorial context that constitutes borders' typical hermeneutic home.

Of particular interest are cases in which borders are used metaphorically in interreligious (cf. Boyarin 2004) or ecological (cf. Hoffmann/Blows 1994) contexts. Counterproductive or even harmful when poorly handled, as with Samuel Huntington's (1996, 256–8) reference to Islam's "bloody borders", such metaphors can yield benefits when handled well, which is to say when employed self-consciously, fallibilistically, and flexibly. What makes such analyses promising is that, represented by the metaphor of borders, the divides within categories can help shed light on the relations *between* categories. This is possible for two reasons. First, there is no absolute difference between the concrete and metaphorical use of the word *border*. These exist in a continuum, always, as noted, given the etymology of the word *border* as a site of negotiated alterity. Second, borders are metonymic

as well as metaphorical, which is one way in which they continue to bear some traces of their concrete dimension even at these comparably abstract levels. Given that metaphor and metonymy function, respectively, in terms of understanding and reference (cf. Lakoff/Johnson 2003, 26), political, religious, or ecological borders are metaphorical relative to each other and metonymic relative to dynamics that exist in history, culture, and politics. When combined with a commitment to represent borders specifically and experientially – that is, at level 1 – such analytical dexterity becomes a valuable tool for exploring intersecting categories in specific cases.

3.4 Level four: Methodological

To investigate borders methodologically is to think of borders less as something one thinks *about* and more as something one thinks *with*. The postcolonial scholar Walter Mignolo (2012, 85), for instance, has referred to his project of "border thinking" in terms of "thinking from dichotomous concepts rather than ordering the world in dichotomies". This is a good example of borders understood methodologically. Another example is the notion of *b/ordering* (cf. Van Houtum/Kramsch/Zierhofer 2005), in which a border, "rather than (only) a noun or an object […] should be seen as a verb, that is, as a practice, a relation, an imagination, and a desire" (Van Houtum 2021, 41). Such methodological engagements with borders suggest that the term *border* can stand in for realities that are more abstract, including as a metonym for logical distinctions.

It is important to recognize that engaging borders methodologically always happens at specific sites and from specific perspectives. There is an element of engaging borders methodologically that combines the abstract with the concrete, and which displays an affinity between methodological and experiential engagements with borders that is significant morally as well as analytically. It is precisely this combination of analytical and moral interest that makes the link between experiential (level 1) and methodological (level 4) levels of thinking about borders worth noting, especially since these comparatively situated/perspectival levels can be commonly applied to complement the comparatively impersonal systemic and metaphorical levels (2 and 3, respectively). Exactly this capacity is demonstrated below with regard to a gap in the moral vision of LS.

The following pair of quotations nicely illustrates the combination of analytical and moral interest for borders understood methodologically.

According to Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, the border is "an epistemological device, which is at work whenever a distinction between subject and object is established" (Mezzadra-Neilson 2013, 16). For Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary, "[A]ny kind of place where an object and a subject are to be thought together is a theater of unequal relations and domination processes" (Amilhat Szary 2015, 10). If one reads the second quotation in light of the first, borders are an epistemological device for combatting inequality and domination. Conversely, if one reads the first quotation in light of the second, borders are the *source*, or at least the *indicator*, of inequality and domination. Interpreted optimistically, these readings suggest a capacity to change how one thinks about borders for the better. Still, if thinking subject and object together is part of the process of thinking about borders – as of course it must be – then, by Amilhat Szary's logic, it also follows that wherever borders are thought, the thinker becomes, themselves, a site of "unequal relations and domination processes". Self-awareness is thus essential for any effort to engage borders, methodologically or otherwise.

4 Mapping the three borders-LS intersections

Recall the claim that borders intersect with the moral vision of LS as a challenge, as a revelation of a gap, and of an opportunity to be pursued. The foregoing taxonomy is helpful as a means of locating each of these forms of intersection at specific points among its four levels. Namely, the three forms of intersection resonate, respectively, at levels 1 and 2 (challenge), 2 and 3 (gap), and 3 and 4 (opportunity). Reframed in terms of each level within the taxonomy, this entails that, with respect to LS, borders are a *recognized challenge* at the experiential level, a *neglected challenge* at the systemic level, a *neglected opportunity* at the metaphorical level, and a *recognized opportunity* at the methodological level. Because these different forms of LS-borders interaction can be localized at different levels in this way, a more precise grasp becomes possible for generating distinct and meaningful responses to each type of borders-LS intersection. The different levels within the taxonomy can even be enlisted together in each case. For example, the challenge to integral ecology identified at levels 1 and 2 can be met with attention to the resources of levels 3 and 4, and the gap at levels 2 and 3 can be met by abstract-specific complementary of levels 4 and 1.

4.1 Borders as challenge

The challenge of borders to the moral vision LS exists primarily at the experiential and systemic levels (1 and 2, respectively). At the experiential level, it will surprise no one that specific border spaces are often sites of suffering, and for that reason alone, they require social-ethical attention. Marianne Heimbach-Steins has sought to incorporate the experience of borders within a broader reflection on borders, migration, and CSE. Heimbach-Steins (cf. 2016a, 39) assigns a profound ambivalence to the experience of borders, a designation that also applies to the Christian tradition's relationship with borders more broadly. For example, at Friendship Park in San Diego, California, which lies at the western edge of the US-Mexico border, Christians on both sides of the border come together each year for the Posada Sin Fronteras, a reenactment of the journey to Bethlehem. The solidarity of that event contrasts strikingly with the "Rosary at the Borders", which was held in Poland in October 2017, and in which thousands marched along the Polish national borders in defense of a "Catholic Poland" against an "Islamic invasion" (Napolitano 2019, 74). When considered alongside the suffering of more-than-human life (cf. Linnell et al. 2016) that exists in border spaces, the challenge of such concrete border experiences to the moral vision of LS is clear, even if also complex.

As for the systemic level of borders, this is a challenge to LS in the sense that economics, technology, migration, ecology, and politics all represent border-related systems that contribute to the widespread hardening of borders that has been taking place since the end of the Cold War. Unfortunately, although Francis did not neglect the challenges of borders at the experiential level during his papacy[3], the same cannot be said for borders understood systemically. With respect to LS, the closest that the encyclical comes to highlighting a border-related challenge systemically is arguably in its assertion of a link between environmental degradation, poverty, and migration (cf. LS 25), which is indeed an urgent systemic issue involving borders, but which is also considerably more complex than the climate change-as-push-factor causality suggested in the text (cf. McLeman 2019). Among commentators on LS, the economist

3 Francis's first official papal trip in 2013, for example, was to the island of Lampedusa, the first of many visits to fraught border zones in which he spoke bluntly and compellingly about border-related suffering.

Herman Daly has made one of the only attempts to link the encyclical with borders at the systemic level. Even if Daly's (2020, 95) claim that "it is […] clear that [Francis] rejects open borders" is unsupported by the encyclical text, it is at least an earnest attempt to draw out a clear position on borders from LS.

4.2 Borders as revelation of a gap

It is at the systemic and metaphorical levels (2 and 3, respectively) that borders most reveal a gap in the moral vision of LS. As already noted, LS does not engage with borders at a systemic level in a significant way. Other than its reference to "no frontiers or barriers, political or social" (LS 52) and a biblical reference in which the word "border" appears non-politically (LS 71), the text makes one additional mention of political borders (LS 177), in which national leaders are called upon to take responsibility for ecological conditions within their respective borders. The text also refers to the "sovereignty of individual nations" (LS 38), which is defended in the name of protecting against ecological destruction on the part of international economic interests. In comparison to, say, the technocratic paradigm, which is subject to extensive critique within the encyclical (cf. LS 101–114) as a cultural force in opposition to integral ecology, borders at a systemic level appear to be little more than an afterthought.

Just as LS does not engage meaningfully with borders systemically, neither does it engage with borders metaphorically. Since the metaphorical level has also been designated as an opportunity, this oversight is especially regrettable. This is the case for several reasons. First, neglecting borders in metaphorical terms diminishes one's capacity to imagine real-world challenges to the moral vision of integral ecology. LS states, for example, that the "human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together" (LS 48). However morally admirable this statement may be, it nevertheless falls short when it comes to attending to the many complex ways in which intra-human and interspecies relations cut against each other. For example, what about an increasingly prominent *green nationalism*, with both European (cf. Ruser/Machin 2019) and American (cf. Hultgren 2015) variants, which ostensibly promotes relations among species over relations between (some) humans? Conversely, what about the tendency within the Catholic encyclical

tradition to promote social solidarity on the basis of the superiority of human over nonhuman life – the moral claims of *Rerum novarum*, for example, are grounded in "man's possession of earth" (RN 8–9) – which foregrounds intrahuman relations at the expense of interspecies ones? An integral ecology enriched by self-conscious attention to borders as metaphors, especially when multiple borders are imagined together, could help address such cases.

A promising way to address the gap that exists in LS in terms of these levels is to highlight those levels that are *not* neglected within the moral vision of LS, which is to say the experiential and methodological understandings of borders (1 and 4, respectively). To integrate levels 1 and 4 implies a degree of self-awareness to the task of engaging borders, since, as already noted, border *thinking* (level 4), like border *experiencing* (level 1), always happens at specific sites and from specific perspectives. Applying these levels to those that have been neglected in LS, then, entails drawing from the relational and perspectival levels for representing borders to address those that are comparatively impersonal, the systemic and metaphorical (2 and 3, respectively). Such a move suggests more than just a capacity to change how one thinks about borders for the better, which was noted above; it also raises the hope that one might convince others to change how they think about borders, as well. Borders, like patterns of thought, are not simply natural objects that must be left untouched and lived with forever. They are dynamic signifiers/shapers of values and systems that can potentially be changed.

4.3 Borders as opportunity

The sense in which borders are an opportunity for the moral vision of LS lies mainly in their being engaged at the metaphorical and methodological levels (3 and 4, respectively). Regarding the metaphorical level, it has already been mentioned that there are regrettable consequences to the lack of a metaphorical understanding of borders in LS. In spite of the oversight, three areas of promise can be identified when one looks beyond LS at some of Francis's other actions and statements, as well as when the term "border" is extended metaphorically into religious and ecological as well as political dimensions. First, LS has been linked (cf. De Tavernier/ Ndubueze 2020) to the planetary boundaries framework of Johan Rockström and his colleagues (cf. Rockström et al. 2020), which

represents a vital area in which borders – or in this case, the borders-adjacent *boundaries* – are used metaphorically.[4]

Second, both in LS and elsewhere during his papacy, Pope Francis demonstrated a sincere commitment to interreligious outreach, an "agonistic respect across creeds" (Connolly 2017, 143) that trespassed across cultural lines without pretending that such lines do not exist; in this respect, the notion of cultural or religious "borders" is acknowledged and put to good use. Writing in reference to the indigenous traditions of the Amazonian region, for example, Francis insisted that "[o]thers must be acknowledged and esteemed precisely *as others*, each with his or her own feelings, choices and ways of living and working" (QA 27). Third, the text of LS explicitly acknowledges how relationships of multiple forms – for example, "with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself" (LS 66) – can intersect and affect each other across domains. What makes this promising is that to recognize, as LS does, that multiple types of relationships affect each other is to imply that multiple border types can affect each other, as well.

Regarding the methodological level of understanding borders, it may seem surprising that LS is not claimed to neglect borders at this level, as was the case for borders understood systemically or metaphorically. Yet since representing borders methodologically is essentially about navigating complex combinations of difference and connection from a particular perspective, there is in fact a direct link between this sort of thinking and the principle of interconnection that defines integral ecology. In order to establish this connection, one simply needs to recognize that such interconnection becomes meaningful *alongside difference*. Pope Francis's intellectual biographer, Massimo Borghesi (2018, xxvi), has asserted a "complex relationship between unity and diversity" as being at the "nucleus of Bergoglio's 'Catholic' thought". This point is not only congenial in abstract terms; it is also fundamentally linked with concrete contexts of encounter.

4 In order to accept that the planetary boundaries model of planetary systems ecology legitimately represents an example of *borders* used metaphorically, one must accept a continuity between the respective meanings of *border* and *boundary*. Borders-boundaries continuity is warranted not only by the shared etymology of these terms (cf. Amilhat Szary 2015, 2), but also by the similarly interchangeable framing of these terms within the literature (cf. Mezzadra/Neilson 2013, 14).

The recognition of distinction alongside connection as fundamental to Francis's thought raises the tricky topological question of whether the connection-across-difference identified by Borghesi applies horizontally as clearly as it does vertically. That there is a vertical complementarity, which is to say, between concrete and abstract, is not in question. Such complementarity is on display, for example, in how Francis balanced local and global in *Fratelli tutti* (FT 142–153). How Francis understands distinction alongside connection horizontally – implying no differences in level of abstraction or moral worth – is less clear. His impulse to pursue intercultural connections does suggest a horizontal understanding, as Francis, to his credit, did not represent his own tradition as categorically "higher" than any other. Yet, when it comes to understanding borders methodologically, it bears searching a bit further.

To that end, a valuable resource comes from Massimo Faggioli, whose book, *The Liminal Papacy of Pope Francis: Moving toward Global Catholicity*, frames Francis's impulses on connection/distinction not only both horizontally and vertically, but also specifically in terms of borders. As Faggioli (2020, 3) puts it, "The concept of liminality is key to understanding Francis's pontificate because of his reinterpretation of the borders in this age of new walls". For Faggioli, this reinterpretation is about relating and connecting rather than excluding the other. As is hopefully clear from this essay's discussion of LS at border-taxonomy levels 1 and 2, there are good reasons to be skeptical that reimagining borders in this way is so simple. Nevertheless, Faggioli's connection between Francis and liminality is promising because it complements the *ethics of liminality* called for by Heimbach-Steins in a way that carries positive implications for a coherent and applicable link between LS and borders. Heimbach-Steins (2015, 69–72) shares Faggioli's emphases on recognizing the other and retaining rather than abandoning borders and adds such elements as a deeper grounding in Scripture, a richer account of ambivalence, and, via the theology of kenosis, the possibility of a self-decentering that speaks to the complex intersection of analysis and normativity in thinking with borders methodologically.

5 Conclusion

The introduction of this essay stated a "core claim" that borders are a resource for thinking clearly and constructively about the insufficient response to LS and the task of rethinking international relations. Both the fourfold taxonomy for representing borders and this taxonomy's application in mapping the three types of LS-borders intersection have contributed to the substantiation of this claim. With regard to the insufficient response to LS, the use of the taxonomy to locate challenges, gaps, and opportunities relative to the encyclical's moral vision speaks not only to the hope that LS will continue to inspire meaningful changes in values and practices, but also that its capacity to inspire might perhaps be refined. At a minimum, the taxonomy helps address a criticism that the moral vision of LS translates only with great difficulty, if at all, into concrete applications, a point that has been made about LS among otherwise sympathetic commentators (cf. Reuber/Fuchs 2019; Deane-Drummond 2020). The taxonomy helps because of its vertical arrangement, in which the methodological understanding of borders (which has been linked with integral ecology at a core level) is embedded within concrete contexts of experience, not just at the borders at the edges of cartographic territories, but wherever differences are encountered. With regard to the international situation, the relations among the taxonomy's levels show how borders' profound — indeed, emblematic — relation to the cross-border economic, political, migration, and ecological systems (level 2) that define contemporary geopolitics can be paired with borders' capacity to be reimagined, whether metaphorically (level 3) or within a self-conscious method (level 4).

As has already been noted, the task of thinking about LS and borders together also has implications for the discipline of CSE, which intersects with borders at each level within the fourfold taxonomy. Engagements on the part of Christian theologians and ethicists with the experiential understanding of borders, for example, include, in addition to the aforementioned work of Heimbach-Steins (cf. 2016a), immersive and empathetic studies of migrant detention centers (cf. Rowlands 2018) and cross-border journeys (cf. Groody 2007).[5]

5 Although neither Anna Rowlands nor Daniel G. Groody explicitly identifies as a CSE scholar, their respective and longstanding applications of Christian

At the systemic level, in addition to direct engagement with borders as reflective of changes in the international system (cf. Slater 2024), the systems of politics, migration, economics, colonialism, and ecology that interact with borders have all inspired considerable social-ethical interest (cf. Heimbach-Steins et al. 2022). At the metaphorical level, scholars in CSE and related disciplines participate in discourses in which borders or boundaries function as metaphors, such as planetary *boundaries* (cf. Vogt 2021) or religious *borders* (cf. Clooney 2010). Still, it is not simply the use of *border* as a metaphor on the part of CSE scholars that bears mentioning here. It is also the sense in which the *borders* within separate domains can be integrated in ways that are of interest to CSE. In this respect, intersectionality is an ambivalent but valuable example of CSE engaging with borders at the metaphorical level (cf. Heimbach-Steins et al. 2024). At the methodological level, CSE can be framed as a kind of "border ethics", which complements its identity as an orientational (cf. Korff 1987), critical (cf. Becka et al. 2020), or transformational (cf. Heimbach-Steins 2022) discipline. CSE has been defined as "an interdisciplinary 'bridging subject' between church and society" (Society of Christian Social Ethics 2018). The bearing of this metaphor on borders' methodological capacity to balance distinction and connection is obvious: If the respective sides of a bridge were not different in some way – that is, were not bordered in some way – the bridge would have no meaning. To recognize this point is to place the methodological function of borders at the heart of CSE.

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theology to such ethical concerns as international migration qualify their work as of legitimate relevance to CSE.

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