

**ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVES WITHIN CANADIAN CHRISTIANITY: EXPLORING OBSTACLES AND  
OPPORTUNITIES**

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Thesis submitted to the University of Ottawa  
in partial Fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Master of Science of Environmental Sustainability

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative study adds to our understanding of the obstacles and opportunities experienced by Canadian, Christian organizations relative to their engagement in environmental initiatives. The core of this inquiry was comprised of sixteen in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with representatives of denominations and humanitarian agencies. Interview questions and the initial coding categories were drawn from the findings of an auto-ethnographic study by Haluza-Delay (2008). The wider relevance of Haluza-Delay's findings was explored by engaging a broader population and by using a more consistent methodology. While this study largely confirmed Haluza-Delay's description of the obstacles and opportunities facing Christian organizations relative to their engagement in environmental initiatives, it also identified an additional set of issues. Political polarization and shrinking resources, previously unidentified barriers, were evident in the data gathered. Occasions to hear from new voices, especially those of indigenous persons and individuals from the global South, were previously unidentified opportunities. Finally, this study found that several of the Canadian, Christian organizations represented by interviewees were undergoing a transition in their understanding of Christian mission, thereby creating new possibilities for environmental engagement.

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
List of Tables.....	vi
Chapter One: Introduction.....	1
Research Question.....	3
The Dynamic Context for Christian Organizations in Canada .....	5
Ecotheology and the Social Scientific Approach of this Study .....	8
Significance of Study .....	11
Chapter Two: Literature Review .....	14
Social Scientific Scholarship .....	15
Associations between Religious Identity and Environmental Performance .....	15
The Greening of Christianity Thesis .....	19
Christian Organizations and Environmental Initiatives: Some Case Studies.....	21
Canadian Studies .....	23
Obstacles and Opportunities to Environmental Engagement.....	25
Chapter Three: Method .....	33
Research Design .....	33
Determining Study Population and Sample .....	34
Study Population .....	34
Sample Studied.....	36
Instrumentation .....	41
Data Collection .....	42
Data Analysis.....	42
Chapter Four: Results.....	45
Types of Environmental Initiatives .....	46
Denominations .....	47
Humanitarian Agencies.....	49
Obstacles to Involvement in Environmental Initiatives .....	51
Paradigmatic Obstacles.....	51
Denominations .....	51
Humanitarian Agencies.....	54
Applicability Obstacles.....	56
Denominations .....	56

Humanitarian Agencies .....	57
Critical Obstacles .....	59
Denominations .....	59
Humanitarian Agencies .....	61
Convictional Obstacles .....	61
Denominations .....	62
Humanitarian Agencies .....	64
Opportunities .....	65
Subcultural Opportunities .....	66
Denominations .....	66
Humanitarian Agencies .....	67
Motivational Opportunities .....	69
Denominations .....	70
Humanitarian Agencies .....	70
Public-Theological Opportunities .....	72
Denominations .....	73
Humanitarian Agencies .....	74
Additional Obstacles and Opportunities .....	76
Denominations: Additional Obstacles .....	76
Denominations: Additional Opportunities .....	77
Humanitarian Agencies: Additional Obstacles .....	79
Humanitarian Agencies: Additional Opportunities .....	79
Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusions .....	82
Study Results in the Context of the Haluza-Delay Obstacles/Opportunities Framework .....	82
Paradigmatic Obstacles .....	83
Applicability Obstacles .....	86
Critical Obstacles .....	87
Convictional Obstacles .....	88
Subcultural Opportunities .....	89
Motivational Opportunities .....	90
Public-Theological Opportunities .....	91
Broader Considerations .....	92
Limitations .....	95

Further Research ..... 96  
Practical Implications..... 96  
References..... 99  
Appendix A..... 109  
Appendix B..... 111  
Appendix C..... 113

## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Table</b>	<b>Page</b>
1.1	Haluzá-Delay's Obstacles/Opportunities Framework .....12
2.1	Summary of Studies Examining Obstacles and Opportunities .....32
3.1	Canadian, Christian Denominations included in Study Population.....35
3.2	Canadian, Christian Humanitarian Agencies Included in Study Population.....37
3.3	Profile of Denominations Included in Sample .....40
3.4	Profile of Humanitarian Agencies Included in Sample .....41
4.1	Summary of Projects and Decision-Making – Denominations .....48
4.2	Summary of Projects and Decision-Making - Humanitarian Agencies .....50
4.3	Summary of Paradigmatic Factors – Denominations.....53
4.4	Summary of Paradigmatic Factors - Humanitarian Agencies.....55
4.5	Summary of Applicability Obstacles – Denominations.....57
4.6	Summary of Applicability Obstacles - Humanitarian Agencies.....58
4.7	Summary of Critical Obstacles – Denominations.....60
4.8	Summary of Critical Obstacles - Humanitarian Agencies.....62
4.9	Summary of Convictional Obstacles – Denominations.....63
4.10	Summary of Convictional Obstacles - Humanitarian Agencies.....64
4.11	Summary of Subcultural Opportunities – Denominations.....67
4.12	Summary of Subcultural Opportunities - Humanitarian Agencies.....68
4.13	Summary of Motivational Opportunities – Denominations.....71
4.14	Summary of Motivational Opportunities - Humanitarian Agencies.....72
4.15	Summary of Public-Theological Opportunities – Denominations.....74
4.16	Summary of Public-Theological Opportunities - Humanitarian Agencies.....75
4.17	Summary of Additional Obstacles and Opportunities – Denominations.....78
4.18	Summary of Additional Obstacles and Opportunities - Humanitarian Agencies .....80

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Early in the summer of 2019 I found myself in conversation with a senior leader of an international, Christian charity. We were both traveling home from a conference in western Canada. I learned that this individual had recently been in Europe consulting with regional representatives of the charity's various global programmes. One thing the representatives agreed on was that responding to climate change would be one of their strategic priorities in the coming decade. While the organization had been involved in local environmental initiatives before, we both recognized that pushing climate change to the forefront of their work might alienate some of their supporters. Nevertheless, the regional representatives had spoken clearly, and the group had concluded that engaging the environmental issue directly was worth the risk. The constituent response was a potential barrier, but the strong voices of the regional representatives pointed the way forward.

Not all Christian organizations are as willing to take on such projects. As I reflected on the conversation on the flight home, I was reminded of the experience of one of my former students. The incident I recalled was from 2014, when I was teaching theology at a Christian college in western Canada. The student had been convinced by Jonathan Wilson's book *God's Good World* (2013), a text that argued for the centrality of creation care within the Christian faith, and she wanted to launch a few environmental initiatives on campus. She narrowed her proposal down to a composting scheme and the creation of a garden on vacant college property. She developed a thoughtful rationale for the project and carefully worked out the practical matters. It would cost the school almost nothing. However, the college administration was far from enthusiastic. While they did not oppose the project, it was made clear to the student that the project was not important. Administrators saw environmental work as distinctly less valuable than teaching marketable skills, growing churches, or even studying the Christian

scriptures. The student's theological convictions prompted her to act, despite the hurdle created by the different priorities of the administrators.

My experience of the uneven response to environmental concerns within the Christian community is shared by others. In March of 2021, *Rolling Stone* ran a long article profiling several young Christians engaged in climate activism. The article described how the connection between faith and environmental concern went against the grain of the Christian culture in which the young activists grew up. One of the featured individuals, from the United States, recounted how it wasn't until he traveled to Kenya that he met Christians whose environmentalism fit integrally with their faith (Morris, 2021). Scot McKnight (2020), a prolific theologian and ordained Anglican deacon whose work takes him across the United States and beyond, has recently described the situation this way: "Most churches seemingly show very little regard for environmental issues as a concern for serious thinking Christians. Environment is not found in most books about the Christian life or discipleship studies" (para. 2). McKnight's observation is obviously based on his own experience. The situation looks somewhat different when we consider the work of larger ecumenical networks here in Canada.

On Earth Day, 2019 three Canadian organizations released a video containing what they called an "urgent plea for climate action" from Christian faith leaders (Canadian Council of Churches, 2019). The collaborating organizations, each with an ecumenical Christian constituency, were KAIROS, Canadian Council of Churches (CCC), and Citizens for Public Justice. The video featured the voices of twenty Canadian, Christian leaders representing a variety of denominations and related organizations, each speaking to the pressing nature of climate change. As of July 26, 2020, the video had been viewed a modest 529 times on YouTube. Just over a decade earlier, in 2007, the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, representing more than 40 affiliated denominations as well as various educational institutions and individual congregations, released a second edition of a document call "God's Earthkeepers: 'The Earth is the Lord's and Everything in it.'" The document contended that modern society's immense power

over nature “may lead to disastrous environmental consequences” and subsequently argued for a practice the author referred to as “earthkeeping” (Geest, 2007, p. 11).

What is interesting to me, and what prompts this thesis, is the sporadic nature of these kinds of initiatives and the uneven engagement in environmentalism across the landscape of Canadian Christianity. As I will show in the following chapter, the uneasy relationship between Christianity and environmental causes has received significant scholarly attention. The focus of this thesis is narrower. It will explore a variety of factors that may function as obstacles or opportunities relative to increased engagement of Christian organizations in environmental initiatives.

### **Research Question**

This thesis is particularly concerned with the actions of Canadian, Christian denominations and related humanitarian agencies. However, to display the rationale of the underlying research question it is valuable to set the specifics of this study within a larger context. In the introduction to a book on the world’s religions and climate change, Veldman et al. (2014) wrote, “As a pervasive and powerful force in the lives of the majority of the world’s people, religions are, at least in theory, well positioned to mobilize millions of people on the issue” (p. 5). There is no reason to think that such potential mobilization is limited to the single issue of climate change. The idea that the world’s religions might contribute positively to addressing the multifaceted environmental crisis has been affirmed by scholars from a variety of vantage points (e.g., Gottlieb, 2007; Posas, 2007; Taylor et al., 2016; Tucker & Grim, 2001; Veldman et al., 2014; Wolf & Gjerris, 2009). The contribution religions could make is thought to be largely in the area of ethical understanding and motivation for change, though it is also noted that some religious communities do possess significant financial and institutional resources. The possible impact, if religious groups were to be more universally engaged in environmental matters, is significant.

The immensity of the global ecological crisis invites the collaboration of a large coalition. Of the various institutions and networks presently active, the world’s religions are in a unique position to work

for positive change. The vast majority of people around the globe participate in one religious tradition or another. The Pew Research Center (2017) estimates that 84% of the world's population, or 6.1 billion individuals, claim a religious identity. The world's major religions span international borders and thus carry the capacity to work at scales beyond most jurisdictions. Because religious communities have long addressed moral issues, they are well-practiced in offering normative guidance and motivation to their adherents (Posas, 2007). Given the potential to effect meaningful change in this way, one cannot help but wonder why some religious communities are engaged in environmental projects while others appear to ignore environmental matters altogether. While such a question is too broad to be explored here, it is this general concern that stands behind the more focused study of relevant obstacles and opportunities described in the pages that follow.

The research described here is an exploration, using social scientific methods, of the factors that inhibit or encourage Christian involvement in environmental projects at an organizational level. The central question that this study seeks to answer relates to the choices Canadian organizations make about their involvement in environmental projects. The question can be put this way: What are the obstacles and opportunities experienced by Canadian, Christian denominations and humanitarian agencies relative to their engagement in environmental initiatives?

Articulating the question this way naturally prompts questions about two key terms. The first such term is "environment." With respect to the subject matter that follows, it is important to recognize that the term carries several limitations. On the one hand, the term "environment" can falsely bifurcate the non-human and human realms. It can give the impression that whatever the environment is, it is "out there," separate and distinct from those linguistic entities doing the labelling. On the other hand, and despite its common usage, the term can legitimately refer to the "built environment" as well as the "natural environment." Therefore, it is important to clarify that in what follows, unless otherwise indicated, the term "environment" should be understood as a shortened form of "natural environment."

The term will be used similarly to the more precise term “ecology” or “ecological,” which is common in the related literature. At issue in this thesis is the human impact on the earth’s biophysical systems and the potential of religious communities to help mitigate the negative elements of this impact. The second key term, then, is “initiatives.” The environmental initiatives studied here refer to projects, programs, or less formal ventures carried out with intent to mitigate the negative impact of the human population on the natural environment. Such initiatives could be direct interventions, e.g., cleaning a river system or planting trees, or they could be indirect interventions, e.g., raising awareness about climate change, teaching a theology of creation care, or communicating to wealthy communities the impact of environmental degradation on the poor.

### **The Dynamic Context for Christian Organizations in Canada**

One of the recent developments in the study of religion and the environment has been the shift away from large-scale theorizing toward a closer analysis of the dynamics in specific contexts (Smith & Veldman, 2020; Vaidyanathan et al., 2018). This study is intended to participate in the latter, therefore some description of the dynamics of the Canadian context in which the studied organizations are active is required. Notwithstanding the overwhelming share of the world’s population that still identifies with one religion or another, the situation in Canada has undergone significant developments in recent decades. In the discussion that follows, it is important to keep some of these dynamics in mind, as they impact the willingness and ability of Canadian, Christian organizations to engage in environmental initiatives.

In recent decades Christianity in Canada has undergone a massive change in its social positioning. In their important quantitative analysis of Christianity in this country, Brian Clarke and Stuart Macdonald (2017) reported that the percentage of Canadians who identify as Christians has declined dramatically. In the 1960s, 96% of Canadians identified as Christians. In 2011 that dropped to 67%. Clarke and Macdonald summarize the shift this way:

Canadian society is entering into a new era, a post-Christian era. . . . While Christian identity remains important, as reflected in the Census, those who are active as Christians are a minority, and churches can no longer assume that Canadians know, or even care to know, what churches stand for. (p. 11)

In the years since the 1960s Canada has more clearly become a multi-faith society. Clarke and Macdonald report that in 2011, the percentage of the population belonging to a world religion other than Christianity was nearly 9% and those who identified with no religion at all reached nearly a quarter of the population. At the same time there has been an increase in the number of people who identify with a religious tradition but do not actively participate in an organized fashion. Clarke and Macdonald estimate that this change means the majority of Canadians are not actively affiliated with a Christian community. For context, this places Canada in the middle of the pack when compared to similar countries in Europe or the British Commonwealth. Canada has, for instance, a lower percentage of religiously unaffiliated persons than New Zealand, Belgium, and France, but higher than that of Denmark, Italy, and Ireland. Though Christianity's influence in Canada has waned substantially in recent decades, it remains the largest religious family in the country. It is for that reason, in addition to Christianity's global status and my own scholarly background, that Christian denominations and humanitarian agencies constitute the focus of this study.

How might we think of the potential mobilization of Christians within Canada as a force for positive environmental change? James Davison Hunter (2010) has argued that the dominant theory of social change operative within Christian communities can be traced to idealism, which is the assumption that societies are transformed by changes in the worldviews of individuals. This approach ignores the "institutional nature of culture" and disregards the "way culture is embedded in structures of power" (p. 27). Alternately, Hunter argues that culture is a dialectical reality. "It is generated and exists at the interface between ideas and institutions; between the symbolic and the social and physical

environment” (p. 34). Hunter goes on to say, “While individuals are not powerless by any stretch of the imagination, institutions have much greater power” (p. 35). It is for this reason that the focus of this study is not on individual beliefs or practices, but on decision-making within religious organizations related to their environmental initiatives. Organizations serve a key role in connecting individuals and enabling their values and beliefs to be enacted in significant ways. Organizations serve an important role in raising awareness of issues among their constituents and in communicating the values of constituents to a broader public. If Christians in Canada are to be mobilized in a positive way with respect to environmental matters, the organizations that, at least in part, shape and enact the outward-facing aspects of their practice of faith will be critical.

The specific population that constitutes the focus of this study will be defined in a subsequent chapter. At this point I will note that the organizations under analysis are Christian denominations and related humanitarian agencies in Canada. This focus on organizations is intended to align with Hunter’s statements above about the significance of institutions in cultural change. Against the backdrop of the changing place of Christianity in Canada, it is important to recognize that the organizations studied here do not have sufficient influence on their own for us to place them at the centre of Canadian society. They are not the most critical actors in the production of potential cultural change relevant to the mitigation of human impact on the natural environment. The leaders of these organizations are not among the most influential gatekeepers or providers of creative direction in Canadian society. However, that does not make them irrelevant. Hunter (2010) says, “when networks of elites in overlapping fields of culture and overlapping spheres of social life come together with their varied resources and in common purpose, cultures do change and change profoundly” (p. 43). If that is true, then the organizations studied here could be part of a broader social and political change that substantially mitigates human impact on the natural environment.

### **Ecotheology and the Social Scientific Approach of this Study**

Much of the scholarly literature on Christianity and the environment is identified as ecotheology. Though it is generally helpful to distinguish between theological and social scientific modes of study, it should be noted that the two types of inquiry can overlap. Some recent theological scholarship has made a point of including social scientific methods (e.g., Coakley, 2013; Scharen, 2005). The Network for Ecclesiology and Ethnography (2021), founded in 2007 by Pete Ward and Christian Scharen, is an international network of scholars whose work, according to the organization's website, combines the "empirical and theological study of the Christian church" (para. 1). The Network for Ecclesiology and Ethnography hosts academic conferences, including an annual gathering in conjunction with the American Academy of Religion, and publishes both a book series and an academic journal. In addition, some scholars, John Milbank being the most prominent (2008), have argued that the social sciences themselves contain crucial theological assumptions and therefore cannot be neatly separated. The relevant point is simply that, notwithstanding the approach I take in this thesis, there is a risk in drawing too clear a line between social scientific study of religious communities and the critical theological work done within them.

Like most religions, Christianity looks to its sacred writings, history, and the experience of its adherents to address emerging challenges to the flourishing of life. The language and practices of Christian communities, like those of other religious traditions, are nuanced and many-layered. This is true of the Canadian, Christian denominations and humanitarian agencies studied here. A key text in the modern discussion about Christianity and the environment is the 1967 essay by Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis." White argued that the Judeo-Christian tradition bears unique responsibility because of the teaching that humans were given "dominion" over God's creation. White's thesis has been challenged by a host of respondents; nevertheless, having been cited more than 7,000 times, it has catalyzed a great deal of the discussion, and the organizations under scrutiny in this study

are, whether aware of it or not, operating within an intellectual milieu shaped by White's seminal analysis. In the decades following the publication of White's essay, Sittler (1972), Schaeffer (1973), Wilkinson (1980), Moltmann (1985), and McFague (1987) produced key volumes developing an environmental ethic from a Protestant perspective. Catholic writing on the subject has been led by the church's official social teaching and by writers such as Teilhard de Chardin (1959), Radford Ruther (1992), and Berry (1988). In the intervening decades this literature has expanded rapidly. Davis (2009), Bauckham (2010), and Wilson (2013) have written general texts exploring the environmental elements of the Bible. Scholars such as Boff (1997), Eaton (2005), and Jennings (2011) have explored theological links between environmental degradation and forms of social oppression, while scholars such as Rasmussen (2015), Northcott (2013), McFague (2012), Gorringer (2018), Bouma-Prediger (2010), and Brunner et al. (2014) have produced a diverse set of theological arguments in favour of a positive relationship between Christianity and environmental matters. In the same vein, but standing apart by virtue of influence, is the encyclical of Pope Francis known as *Laudato Si'* (2015), which has inspired a great deal of commentary of its own (e.g., Crabbé, 2018). Pope Francis follows in the footsteps of the Orthodox leader, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew (1998), who argued that the abuse of nature is a sin. The ecotheology literature has expanded in recent years to the extent that Jenkins (2008) and Deane-Drummond (2017) have written book-length overviews of this field. Years earlier, Kearns (1996) developed a typology to describe the ethical models used by Christian scholars and activists. She found that individuals who believed Christian theology and scriptures prompted concern for the environment tended to use one of the following ethical models: stewardship, eco-justice, or creation spirituality. While more recent scholarship (e.g., Moyer & Scharper, 2019) has pointed out some of the limitations of Kearns's typology, it continues to be employed to describe the field (e.g., Dula, 2020; Jenkins, 2008).

The above survey of ecotheology literature is very brief, as this thesis focuses on the obstacles and opportunities that Canadian, Christian organizations encounter rather than on ecotheology.

However, sustained engagement with the sacred writings, history, and teachings of the Christian tradition is relevant background to any serious study of Christian communities and ecological matters. Decision-making within Canadian, Christian organizations, to varying degrees, takes place within the paradigms established and explored by ecotheologians. Therefore, though my own study uses social scientific methods, it cannot help but remain in dialogue with the theological literature. While it is aspects of organizations available to and suitable for empirical study that capture the focus of my present research, these organizations' invisible lives, memories, stories, and nuances of theological language are ever-present and cannot be forgotten in any consideration of obstacles and opportunities *vis-à-vis* engagement in environmental initiatives. Furthermore, and this is no small point, the existence of this ecotheological literature suggests that there are valid reasons for Christian organizations to engage in environmental causes. Though it is not clear which obstacles or opportunities are most salient to the decisions made by Canadian, Christian organizations, the substantial ecotheological literature shows that ample motivation can be drawn from the biblical and theological authorities recognized by these organizations.

When one asks why Christian organizations, including denominations and humanitarian agencies, are not more consistently involved in environmental projects, a common response is to point to theological obstacles (e.g., certain types of eschatology or young-earth creationism) created by aspects of the Christian Bible or certain doctrinal teachings that negatively dispose Christians toward caring about environmental matters (e.g., Bouma-Prediger, 2010; White, 1967). However, it is not empirically clear how significant doctrinal matters such as these are to Canadian, Christian denominations and humanitarian agencies. The uncertainty about the impact of theological matters means that there is much that can be learned by supplementing the extensive theological study of Christianity and the environment with social scientific research. In addition, some facets of the ecotheological literature illustrate the shortcoming described by Hunter (2010), which is the assumption

that the matter can be addressed by swapping out bad ideas for good ones or replacing decent concepts with great ones. It may be that the main inhibitors of Christian engagement in environmental initiatives are not strictly theological. It is possible, for instance, that the Bible could be read either for and against ecological concerns, and that factors beyond it and the intellectual tradition linked to it are more decisive. For those reasons, this study will take an empirical approach to the research question.

Compared to the ecotheology literature, there is much less scholarship engaging matters of religion and ecology from a social scientific perspective (Veldman et al., 2014). What are the obstacles and opportunities experienced by Canadian, Christian denominations and humanitarian agencies relative to their engagement in environmental initiatives? While theologians have addressed questions like this one for centuries using the categories and inquiry native to that discipline, studying this question with a social scientific lens allows for the inclusion of data that would not come into focus through theological study. It allows us to look more closely at the way specific organizations make decisions about their engagement in environmental initiatives.

### **Significance of Study**

One empirically-grounded paper, published by Randolph Haluza-Delay (2008) in the journal *Human Ecology*, is especially relevant to the question that drives this thesis and shapes the methodology I used to explore that question. The paper, titled “Churches engaging the environment: An autoethnography of obstacles and opportunities,” uses a social scientific methodology and provides a framework for considering the impact of theological factors alongside other aspects of church life. I will present a summary of Haluza-Delay’s findings in the subsequent chapter. At this point it will be sufficient to say that Haluza-Delay distills his findings into a set of four “obstacles” and three “opportunities” (see Table 1.1). I will refer to those findings as the “obstacles/opportunities framework” throughout this thesis.

**Table 1.1**

## Haluzá-Delay's Obstacles/Opportunities Framework

Obstacles	Opportunities
Paradigmatic: "those elements of theological beliefs or worldviews that disable attention to environmental concerns" (p. 74).	Subcultural: "those social practices of congregations that lead to more effective learning occasions" (p. 76).
Applicability: "conflicts over the appropriate amount of attention to give environmental concerns" (p. 75).	Motivational: "those dimensions that potentially increase the effectiveness of environmental awareness because of the faith-based commitment" (p. 77).
Critical: "those that result from underanalysis of societal and cultural factors that affect the human-earth relationship" (p. 75).	Public-theological: "those factors that can constructively engage the public discourse within a pluralist society" (p. 77).
Convictional: "barriers on the level of lifestyle and willingness to act" (p. 76).	

In general terms Haluzá-Delay's (2008) observations align with the work of other scholars. For instance, Posas (2007) has observed a similar dynamic, noting that religions can "both deliver and obstruct solutions" (p. 10). Nche (2020a) surveyed a wide set of studies and distilled a set of barriers and bridges relative to ecclesial involvement in the mitigation of climate change. However, Haluzá-DeLay's paper is uniquely relevant to my research question for three reasons. First, Haluzá-Delay's methodology is social scientific and grounded in the observation of actual faith communities. Second, the data are drawn, at least in part, from a Canadian context. Third, Haluzá-Delay's analysis shows a specific familiarity with Christian theology and the context of ecclesial communities that produces insights overlooked by some other scholars.

This study is also significant because it used Haluzá-Delay's (2008) obstacles/opportunities framework to explore decision-making related to involvement in environmental initiatives among a broader set of organizations than his initial study. This significance is enhanced by the fact that the focus of this study is not on organizations that were founded expressly to address environmental issues. These kinds of organizations do exist in Canada (e.g., A Rocha, Green Churches Network). However, this study seeks to understand how organizations with a broader mandate, and a constituency not self-selected to

approve of environmental projects, make related decisions about their ministry portfolio. As suggested above, existing social science research in this field is quite limited. The research that does exist tends to focus on those organizations created specifically to do environmental work (e.g., Ellingson et al., 2012; Moyer & Scharper, 2019) or the relationship of religious identity and environmental views in individuals (e.g., Morrison et al., 2015). Furthermore, little research has been conducted in the Canadian context (Moyer, 2018). If religious organizations are to contribute positively toward meeting the challenge of the ecological crisis, understanding the dynamics of how organizations with relatively broad mandates might address these matters is important. Christian denominations and humanitarian agencies generally have greater resources than do faith-based organizations dedicated solely to environmental matters. They also possess the potential to show that environmental issues are central to the Christian faith and not a niche concern. Though the focus of this study is Canadian organizations, it could offer hints at how Christians around the world might be more fully mobilized. A little more than one-third of the world's population, roughly 2.3 billion people, consider themselves Christians (Pew Research Center, 2017).

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on religion and the environment is recent and dynamic, according to Bergmann (2017). He likens it to “a child still finding its feet” that “can take the hands of its parents, theology and religious studies, and find support among older siblings such as philosophy, history, anthropology, biology and others” (p. 13). The field may still be young, but the body of scholarship has already reached significant size. There are several ways one might begin to grasp the scale of this literature. Searching a university library database for the phrase “religion and environment” produces more than half a million articles, thesis/dissertations, and book chapters. The phrase “religion and ecology” produces a smaller stack of literature, though the list still surpasses 100,000 articles, theses/dissertations, and book chapters (biblio.uottawa.ca).

One way to see the developing nature of the field is by considering the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology (2020). The project, which was started in 1998 by prominent scholars in the field Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, is a curated repository of this type of literature. The work of the Yale Forum assumes that the world’s religions “transmit ecological and justice perspectives in their scriptures, rituals, and contemplative practices as well as in their moral and ethical commitments” (para. 1). Therefore, the Yale Forum works to “identify those perspectives” with the goal of addressing the global environmental crisis (Yale Forum, 2020). Consulting the organization’s website shows that the Yale Forum and its affiliates are responsible for hundreds of publications, including scholarly papers, essay collections, books, annotated bibliographies, conference proceedings, and newsletters, as well as several films and courses. Still another way to grasp the amount of research related to religion and the environment is to note that a meta-analysis conducted by Taylor et al. (2016) surveyed “over 700” articles related to the hypothesis that religions are greener now than they once were (p. 1000). Given

the wealth of literature within this dynamic field, the review that follows will focus on the studies most relevant to the question this thesis addresses.

### **Social Scientific Scholarship**

As noted in the previous chapter, Veldman et al. (2014) identified the majority of the literature on the subject of religion and climate change as theological. What Veldman et al. observed with respect to religion and climate change is symptomatic of the larger field of religion and the environment: the theological literature is extensive, while the social scientific literature is more limited. This difference may reflect the scholarly backgrounds of those interested in the religion and environment field or it may reflect the ease with which theological studies can be undertaken by individual scholars.

### **Associations between Religious Identity and Environmental Performance**

Within the social scientific study of religion and the environment, a central question is the impact of religious identity on environmental views and behaviours. This question has direct bearing on the incentives some Canadian, Christian denominations and humanitarian agencies might have for engaging or not engaging in environmental initiatives. What constitutes “religion” in these sorts of studies varies; however, the term is generally employed to reflect the self-identification of individuals with one of the world’s global faiths or the study of a specific organized religious body. It should be noted that the relationship between a religious tradition and the culture or cultures it inhabits is notoriously complex. Thus, for example, Max Weber (1905/1958) used the slippery term spirit (*geist*) to describe the ethos he believes was created by Protestantism in which capitalism came to thrive. Similarly, Pierre Bourdieu’s (1990) reclamation of the concept of *habitus* has been readily employed by philosophers of religion and theologians to understand the nature of religious practice (e.g., Hunter, 2010; Smith, 2013; Jenkins, 2011).

With respect to links to environmental matters, more research has been done on Christianity than any other religion. As far back as 1995, Kanagy and Nelsen found that among Americans there was

no correlation between religiosity and self-identification as an environmentalist. Controlling for education, age, gender, and region, almost eliminated any correlation between religiosity and views on environmental regulations. Ellingson et al. (2012) conducted a study of 63 religious environmental organizations in the United States. They found that theological similarity was positively associated with a willingness of these organizations to partner together. The researchers hypothesized that this willingness was due to the importance those organizations placed on how their constituencies viewed their social positioning. Partnering with the “wrong” groups, even if they shared environmental goals, could lead to unhelpful associations. In a study focused on policy and risk assessment, Smith and Leiserowitz (2013) found that, though the majority of evangelicals in the United States did believe that global warming was happening, that it would have serious consequences, and that it was caused by humans, they were less likely than non-evangelical Americans to hold those beliefs.

Morrison et al. (2015) studied Australians and found that religion was correlated with attitudes and behaviours related to climate change. This conclusion was the result of an online survey of nearly 2,000 Australians that explored the impact of membership in Buddhist, Christian literalist, and Christian non-literalist camps. This study found that Christians who interpreted the Bible “literally” were least engaged in climate change issues. As insightful as this study may be in some respects, the central literalist/non-literalist distinction is dubious and serves as a warning about the difficulty of this sort of research and the importance of keeping theological discourse in mind. The literalist/non-literalist hermeneutical distinction is not native to the history of biblical interpretation (Levy, 2018). Traditional Christian biblical interpretation encourages readers to look for multiple layers of meaning within the text, including literal and spiritual, the latter of which can be further unfolded into layers of typological, moral, and eschatological meaning. It is likely that what the researchers were uncovering in respondents who identified with one hermeneutical strategy over the other was more of an expression of a theological self-understanding than the actual impact of a literal or non-literal hermeneutic on

environmental ethics. Morrison et al. (2015) are not the only social scientists to use the literal/non-literal distinction as a way to understand Christian environmentalism. The use of this distinction is disappointing because a more sophisticated description of the relationship between biblical literalism and environmental views was provided years earlier by Greeley (1995), who argued that a variety of more general categories offer greater explanatory power than do doctrinal professions.

Vaidyanathan et al. (2018) offered a programmatic assessment of the role of religious beliefs in shaping environmental views and practice. With respect to the focus of this thesis, Vaidyanathan et al. found that congregations are an important site for “cultivating and encoding” environmental actions and skill formation. Stated more generally: “Institutions have the potential to shape our behaviors and moral commitments both within and outside of a particular institutional context” (p. 488). More generally still, these researchers suggested that the ambivalence in the scholarship on religion and the environment represents the complexity of a reality where location, habit, and reputation have a stronger impact than doctrine. Responding to the need for more contextual studies, Schuman et al. (2018) studied three rural communities in South Africa in an effort to understand the impact of religious beliefs on climate change adaptation. Though most the study participants were Christians, the researchers looked most closely at the potential impact of fatalistic theologies regardless of their source. The study explored the impact of certain types of beliefs that held across the sometimes-fluid boundary between religious traditions. The researchers identified two distinct groups, the “religious determinists” and the “religious participants” (p. 10). The former saw nature as something beyond their control, while the latter saw nature as something upon which they could have an impact. It is worth noting here that, unlike some less empirical studies (e.g., Zaleha & Szasz, 2015) the study by Schuman et al. identified the deification of nature with determinism and, therefore, lower environmental concern. In the same year Bomberg and Hague (2018) published a study of the relationship of Christianity and environmental ethics from a different perspective. Using mobilization theory to study churches and Christian

environmental organizations in Scotland, these researchers found that, though churches brought a unique perspective to environmental matters, the significance of religious identity was not great. They found a weak link between religious identity and political engagement in environmental matters. Nevertheless, the researchers concluded, supporting the line of inquiry guiding this present thesis, that church groups did hold potential to reach previously unengaged constituencies.

The recent contextual turn in scholarship on religion and the environment has shown the limitations of drawing generalized conclusions from limited geographic studies (Smith & Veldman, 2020; Vaidyanathan et al., 2018). In this respect, a paper by Smith and Veldman (2020) is particularly notable. Their research showed that attitudes toward the environment differed between evangelicals in the United States and those in Brazil. While evangelical identity was correlated with negative environmental attitudes in the United States, it was not in Brazil. This was true even though the two groups were a part of the same Christian denomination. A survey conducted by the Public Religious Research Institute and the American Academy of Religion found a similarly notable disparity between various types of Christians in the United States. For example, the study found that, while 43% of Hispanic Catholics in that country were “very concerned” about climate change, only 17% of White Catholics shared that level of concern; and, while 37% of Black Protestants were “very concerned” about climate change, only 18% of White Evangelical Protestants were similarly concerned (Jones et al., 2014, p. 15). In comparison, 29% of all Americans were “very concerned.” In another notably contextual study, Nche (2020b) explored the views of climate change held by Nigerian church leaders. While Nche remained convinced that Nigerian Christians had potential to engage this issue, the study found the most prominent church bodies in the country (Anglican, Catholic, and Pentecostal) were not deeply engaged in climate change mitigation. The shift toward contextual scholarship that these latter studies symbolize highlights the need for studies focused on Canada, as well as other countries.

## **The Greening of Christianity Thesis**

Is the relationship between Christianity and environmental beliefs and behaviours changing? If so, we would expect to hear representatives of Canadian, Christian denominations and humanitarian agencies describe a change in their organization's involvement in environmental initiatives over recent years. In addition, if Christianity is becoming "greener" the barriers identified in earlier studies (e.g., Haluza-Delay, 2008; Smith & Pulver, 2009) might no longer be applicable. The so-called "greening-of-Christianity" thesis has been batted about by scholars for several decades. Shibley and Wiggins (1997) endeavored to describe pro-environmental developments among mainline churches in the United States. Their descriptive sociological analysis, intended to add to what they then saw as "the meager literature on religious environmentalism," studied a prominent coalition, known as the National Religious Partnership on the Environment (p. 335). The researchers used the ethical typology developed by Kearns (1996) to assess the ethical approach of the coalition in an effort to evaluate the claim that the eco-justice approach was "transforming American environmentalism" (p. 335). The researchers did not offer much evidence for the changes in attitudes or behaviours of a grass-roots constituency. In an introduction to a special journal issue dedicated to religion, ecology and climate change, Tucker and Grim (2001) claimed that religious leaders and lay people around the world were "increasingly speaking out for protection of the environment" (p. 12). Though Tucker and Grim provided extensive examples of such speech, it was unclear that their examples substantiated the claim that it was increasing. The difficulty of demonstrating such claims empirically is symptomatic of the debate that runs throughout this literature. Wilkinson (2010) provided a description of the fraught character of environmental issues in evangelical contexts. Relying largely on data acquired through a series of focus groups and interviews with evangelicals in the U.S., she found that, even though evangelical leaders were sympathetic to environmental concerns, their views were not shared among their grassroots evangelical constituency. Wilkinson argued that this discrepancy was due to political pre-commitments and an ingrained

individualism endemic to the movement. Subsequently, Wilkinson (2012) published a monograph expanding the research presented in her 2010 paper, but she did not substantially alter the argument.

The failure of official pro-environmental positions to affect grass-roots attitudes is not limited to American evangelicals. A similar disjuncture was also observed in the Church of England, where overt environmental programs carried out at the diocesan level failed to impact grassroots churchgoers (DeLashmutt, 2011). A study by Clements et al. (2013) found that Christians in the United States were not more environmentally concerned than non-Christians and neither did they engage in more pro-environmental behaviour. However, they found that more religious Christians did engage in more pro-environmental behaviour than those who were less committed. Clements et al. rejected the greening-of-Christianity thesis, but allowed that a shift in attitudes among leaders might yet filter down to rest of the constituency. Taylor et al. (2016) studied the question through a meta-analysis involving more than 700 historical, qualitative, and quantitative studies from around the world. The analysis used on this heterogeneous data set is rather opaque; however, the researchers were confident that their study showed no scientific evidence that religions, including Christianity, have become greener. Looking specifically at Christianity in the United States, Konisky (2018) analyzed longitudinal data from an annual Gallup survey and found little evidence that Christians have expressed more environmental concern over time. Whether or not some subset of Christians are actually greener now than they were at some prior time can still be debated, but the overwhelming finding of these studies is that such a change cannot be proven. With respect to the research question guiding this study, the rejection of the greening-of-Christianity thesis implies that earlier studies, such as the one by Haluza-Delay (2008) identified in the last chapter, may still have relevance. It also suggests that furthering our understanding of the factors that inhibit Christian organizations from engaging in environmental initiatives remains a valuable focus of scholarly attention.

### **Christian Organizations and Environmental Initiatives: Some Case Studies**

Social scientific research on Christianity and the environment also includes studies of specific environmental initiatives. These sorts of studies generally focus on the details of the initiatives themselves rather than seeking larger questions related to a religion's environmental ethic or specific national or cultural themes. Though it is difficult to say precisely which studies fall under this heading, the fact that my research asks about involvement in environmental initiatives makes it useful to describe at least some of them. Holden and Jacobson (2009) studied the opposition of the Roman Catholic Church in Guatemala to the liberalization of mining laws. The concern for the impact of mining on the nation's poor was not limited to a few concerned leaders but was taken up by "the church as a whole in Guatemala" (p. 155). The chief form of engagement was the provision of critical information on the potential impact of nearby mining. The researchers concluded that in this context liberation theology was the "consummate counter-hegemonic discourse" (p. 162). Mohamad et al. (2012) studied the contributions of four religious communities in Malaysia toward sustainable solid waste management. Though national recycling rates in the country were low, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, and Muslim communities each ran successful recycling programs. One of the notable findings was that, in addition to reducing solid waste, the programs also generated revenue for the benefit of the wider community, thereby connecting the sustainable practice to the longstanding practice of charity. Billings and Samson (2012) studied an evangelical Protestant organization, known as Christians for the Mountains, that opposed mountaintop removal coal mining in the Appalachian region of the United States. The researchers found that the organization used traditional theological language and a form of activism native to the evangelical tradition to reframe the mining practice and overcome some of the opposition to environmentalism within this segment of Christianity in the United States.

Grønvold (2013) studied the Church of Norway as an example of how Christian theology might be reoriented to be more environmentally friendly through the adoption of a biocentric paradigm.

Grønvold's paper, as are many in this section, is an example of the sometimes fuzzy distinction between theology and social scientific research. Drawing on a case study of Bishop Tor Berger Jørgensen's public opposition to oil exploration in northern Norway, Grønvold's paper reaches a starkly normative conclusion: "As influential and well-organized institutions, Christian churches must seek to bear their part of the responsibility for how the world is developing, and address the ecological crisis we face using their most powerful tool: theology" (p. 280). Though Grønvold's profile is an interesting example of ecclesial political advocacy, it is not entirely clear, based on his empirical findings, why he concludes that theology is the church's most powerful tool or if it is accurate to call Christian churches "well-organized." Perhaps both are true in the Norwegian context, even if it does not appear to be the case elsewhere.

Moyer (2015) used archival research, interviews, and participant-observation to produce a profile of two faith-based organizations engaged in environmental initiatives in Kenya. The study was conducted on the supposition that "faith-based approaches may possess unique resources for promoting communication, thoughtful reflection, and learning in the realm of sustainability" (p. 45). Moyer found that the faith-based values of these organizations in Kenya allowed them to integrate environmental concern with "empowering and improving the lives of rural people" (p. 61). This integration was significant because Moyer also identified the strong learning cultures and breadth of activities of these organizations as key to their effectiveness. Moyer's (2015) paper profiles organizations described in several of her previous papers, including one on learning for sustainability in a Kenyan context (Moyer et al., 2013) and another that was a general survey of faith-based organizations involved in sustainability projects in Kenya (Moyer et al., 2011). Also focused on an African context, Klepeis et al. (2016) combined ethnographic research with data drawn from conservation research to study sacred forests in the northern highlands of Ethiopia. The researchers found that forests sustained by the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church were important for maintaining local

ecosystems. They identified these church forests as products of an active, community-based approach to conservation that was highly effective at protecting both forests and cultural practices. They concluded that this approach “provides an example of the effectiveness of community-based natural resource management” (p. 727).

### **Canadian Studies**

The studies cited in the sections above (and others not cited) notwithstanding, the relationship of Christianity and environmentalism has not been thoroughly studied in most countries around the world, including Canada. Despite sharing a continent, the religious and political environment in Canada is distinct from that of the more-studied United States in several significant ways (Moyer, 2018; Moyer & Scharper, 2019). Not only are different religious bodies dominant in these two countries, but, according to Thiessen (2015), Canada is more clearly on a secularizing path. Clarke and MacDonald (2017) referencing data they describe as “circa 2011,” point out that a higher percentage of Canadians are religiously unaffiliated in Canada than in the United States. More recent studies have found a higher percentage of religiously unaffiliated people in the United States (e.g., Public Religion Research Institute, 2020; Pew Research Center, American Trends Panel, 2021); nevertheless, it stands to reason that the point made by Moyer and Scharper can be sustained. While findings related to Christianity and the environment from the United States may raise appropriate questions, they cannot simply be applied in Canada.

Noting the significant potential for environmental leadership from Canada’s faith communities, Lysack (2013) studied their advocacy related to climate change. Lysack combined autoethnographic and participant observation methods to develop “glimpses into the landscape of faith communities in Canada” (p. 158). In addition to identifying “barriers to success” and “pathways to effective action,” which will be described below, Lysack tabulated advocacy actions, including the development of position papers and participation in public campaigns, taken by 16 Canadian “faith communities” (p. 165). He

concluded that, though these communities had the potential to become “effective leaders” on the issue of climate change, they remained haunted by a “lack of action” (p. 171). Moyer (2018) conducted a multi-method study of sixteen faith-based environmental organizations in Canada. Her study provides a helpful baseline of knowledge about such organizations in Canada. It showed that organizations involved in this form of environmentalism began in the 1960s or later. The older ones, such as Mennonite Central Committee and Citizens for Public Justice, began with a broader set of programs related to social justice and humanitarian issues. Moyer found that these organizations added environmental programs in the 1970s and 1980s after seeing the impact of environmental degradation on human communities. Most of the faith-based organizations involved in environmental work in Canada have been founded since 1990. The majority of these organizations are small, with less than ten employees. Moyer’s research also found that the majority of faith-based organizations involved in environmental work in Canada identified with Christianity. The most common type of environmental programming carried out by these faith-based organizations was educational, followed by theological reflection, political advocacy, and congregational resourcing. For some (e.g., A Rocha) advocacy and activism were limited by fears of alienating supporters. Moyer concluded her profile by confirming the need for further research on these faith-based organizations. Subsequently, Moyer and Scharper (2019) published a paper, apparently drawing on much of the same research, attempting to amend the work of Kearns (1996) cited above. Where Kearns developed a three-part typology specific to Christian environmental ethics, Moyer and Scharper studied organizations from a variety of religious traditions. They suggested that faith-based environmentalism in Canada is best understood as a tapestry woven from the following resources: (a) scripture and theology, (b) traditions, values, virtues; (c) new cosmology; (d) nature experience/revelation; and (e) ritual. The distinctions used by Moyer and Scharper in this paper are not always clear. One wonders what differentiates theology from values or traditions from rituals. Whether or not this tapestry image is definitive enough to aid our understanding of the Canadian situation will be

indicated by subsequent citations, but the larger picture is helpful in understanding the milieu inhabited by Canadian, Christian organizations.

Backer (2019) studied two Canadian faith communities, using qualitative techniques to understand how these communities functioned as venues for learning about sustainability. Her work suggests that learning may be a key lens for understanding potential contributions of Canadian, Christian churches. Moyer and Brandenburg (2021) updated and expanded Moyer's earlier work in an effort to trace the development of "faith-based environmental sustainability activities among diverse faith communities in Canada" (p. 1268). The researchers added findings from interviews with staff members from 16 organizations as well as three individuals with extensive knowledge of faith-based environmentalism in Canada to the data reported by Moyer (2018) and Moyer and Scharper (2019). Moyer and Brandenburg found that environmental initiatives were carried out in various forms in many of the groups they studied, and that some of this work began much earlier than had previously been believed. They identified Unitarian, United Church, Anglican, Mennonite, Lutheran, Baha'í, and Roman Catholic faith communities as leaders in Canada. They also observed that, even though secularization threatened to undermine some of the leading organizations they studied, new and positive trends involved interfaith and inter-denominational collaboration. The researchers were hopeful that religious communities largely comprised of recent immigrants to Canada would make significant contributions to environmental work once they found their footing in this country.

### **Obstacles and Opportunities to Environmental Engagement**

Many of the studies cited above, especially those exploring the connection between religious identity and environmental performance, deal with potential obstacles and opportunities relative to environmental engagement. A number of scholars have done more focused studies on the obstacles and opportunities for the involvement of religious organizations in environmental initiatives. The breadth of this type of literature can be seen in papers like those by Ornnert (2020) and Johnsen (2021). Ornnert's

(2020) paper is a review of the scholarly literature related to “drivers and barriers to environmental engagement” in Middle Eastern and North African countries (p. 1). Her study noted the growing scholarly interest in the potential role of Islamic ethics in motivating environmental action along with several examples of Muslim-majority countries giving official sanction to the development of environmental policies along these lines. Orrnert found that political polarization, sectarian divisions and a reliance on oil and gas extraction limited environmental engagement across the Middle East and North Africa. Where environmental engagement was successful in shaping public priorities, activists were able to create broad coalitions of interested parties as well as alliances with social or governmental elites. Johnsen (2021) identified the traditional “business case for sustainability” as a barrier to many organizations taking on more creative and impactful environmental projects (p. 1). This traditional paradigm, especially popular in organizations seeking to make a profit, is used to make the case for environmental considerations in a business context but limits potential actions through their economic valuation. Most alternatives require decision makers to believe in the inherent value of environmental conservation or some set of transcendent values. Johnson sees the assumptions with the traditional approach and alternatives tied to transcendent values as significant barriers. In their stead he offers an alternative based on the distinction the philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1983) makes between morality and ethics. Johnsen explores the usefulness of this distinction in creating an alternative paradigm for organizational environmentalism through a case study involving architects and building engineers. Studies like those by Orrnert and Johnsen demonstrate the broad interest in identifying obstacles and opportunities within a variety of corporate contexts. The rest of the studies reviewed here relate more specifically to Christian communities and organizations.

Many of the studies related to Christian engagement in environmental initiatives cited above deal with potential obstacles and opportunities to environmental engagement by Christian organizations. The ones below are the studies that do so more directly. Smith and Pulver (2009)

conducted interviews with representatives from 42 religious environmental groups in the United States as a way of studying ethical environmentalism. They described ethical environmentalism as a growing alternative to the more political or technocratic issue-based environmentalism of the last century. Smith and Pulver wrote, “Religious-environmental organizations work explicitly to instill and strengthen environmental ethics, in addition to pursuing the more issues-based work of secular environmentalists” (p. 169). They found that these religious organizations saw their environmental work as a logical outworking of their theological commitments. This religious footing gave these organizations confidence in their ability to promote positive environmental values and behaviours that countered those of the larger culture. Though the benefits of addressing root ethical causes of the ecological crisis makes sense, Smith and Pulver acknowledged that it is difficult to know how effective this strategy is. Their study highlights an underlying theme in the research surveyed thus far: faith-based organizations rely on the shared theological assumptions of their constituents and the belief that faith should be lived out in the world.

In the paper that guides my own study, Haluza-Delay (2008) analyzed data drawn from his experience interacting with Christian communities, including leading adult Sunday school classes, speaking to groups, developing church-based study curriculum, and engaging in dialogue with church members. From this experience he distills a set of four “obstacles” and three “opportunities” relevant to environmental programming in churches. The obstacles were classified as either paradigmatic (hindering beliefs or worldviews), applicability (lack of attention), critical (under-analysis of their cultural situation), and convictional (low willingness to act). The opportunities were classified as subcultural (local social practices), motivational (enhanced commitment or obligation), and public-theological (ability to engage public discourse). Haluza-Delay’s paper appears to be primarily drawn from a context of small, local church groups and the form of environmental engagement he appears to have in mind is primarily educational.

Though Haluza-Delay's (2008) obstacles/opportunities framework shapes my own study, his paper is not without crucial limitations. Most importantly, the study's methodology makes it difficult to generalize the findings beyond a very narrow set of (undefined) institutions. Haluza-Delay was aware of this issue. Early in the paper he wrote, "those who will be engaging with religious groups about environmental concerns are cautioned to apply the following themes with care" (p. 73). In the paper's conclusion he reiterated the caution: "This paper is admittedly exploratory and focused on an analysis of my own experiences" (p. 80). The data Haluza-Delay worked with were drawn informally from his experience in a variety of settings over two decades. Notwithstanding this (potentially) extensive immersion in ecclesial contexts, the nature of autoethnography makes it difficult to generalize the paper's conclusions. In fact, due to the lack of clarity around the type of groups Haluza-Delay engaged or the nature of his presence in these groups, it is quite difficult to know to which organizations or communities his results apply. Therefore, my own research project takes the obstacles/opportunities framework as an initial heuristic and more formally explores it by triangulating Haluza-Delay's findings with the experience of a broader set of organizations.

A more recent paper by Nche (2020a) reports the results of a review of 130 empirical studies of religion and the environment. Nche's analysis of the literature generally corroborated the conclusions of Taylor et al. (2016) and Konisky (2018) with respect to the greening-of-Christianity hypothesis. However, Nche went further than those studies and distilled a common set of barriers and bridges relevant to the involvement of churches in the mitigation of climate change. Nche categorized the barriers he found as either theological/doctrinal or institutional/general. In the first category Nche placed eschatological assumptions about the near-term destruction of the earth, a strong belief in human dominion over the natural world, a fatalistic view of divine providence, and an inerrantist view of scripture. In the institutional/general category Nche identified the active opposition by groups like the (misleadingly-named) Interfaith Stewardship Alliance to environmental statements from church groups, a lack of

understanding of climate change, and a lack of access to the level of funding available to other NGOs. Nche named the available bridges as the biblical concept of stewardship, the potential for increased awareness of climate change, and opportunities for more strategic engagement and fundraising. Several recent papers include relevant obstacle/opportunity summaries in the context of larger inquiries. The paper by Moyer et al. (2012) cited above is one example. These researchers found that the faith-based identity of the environmental organizations in Kenya prompted some beneficiaries to expect handouts and also made it challenging to work with groups that did not share the same faith. In addition, the limited size, time, and funding available to these organizations was a barrier, as was the need, in some cases, for approval from church leaders. On the positive side, Moyer et al. found a general openness to incorporating conservation into faith. They observed that church connections provided the organizations with important organizational know-how and links to trusted leaders. These church connections also helped to connect the environmental organizations with a variety of community concerns. Finally, the researchers noted that the faith-based approach of these organizations positioned them well for integrating community, spiritual, and environmental concerns, and encouraged a sense of hope among participants.

Mucunguzi et al. (2021) studied five faith-based organizations, both Christian and Muslim involved in tree planting in Uganda. The paper described the benefits of this tree planting activity as well as the resources and constraints these organizations faced. While the focus of this study was not on the obstacles and opportunities related to engagement in environmental initiatives more generally, the findings from the Ugandan context are somewhat relevant to the question being pursued here. Mucunguzi et al. found that the faith-based organizations they studied generally possessed strong networking, administrative, motivational capacity but were often hampered by inadequate funding, negative attitudes from local communities, an inadequate supply of indigenous tree seedlings, and a lack of environmental know-how. The Moyer and Brandenburg (2021) paper cited above named theological

views, including belief in human supremacy, focus on spiritual salvation, and distrust of science, alongside social factors, including aging and shrinking membership, decline in revenue, and related staffing cuts, as barriers to faith-based environmental initiatives. They named the common holistic approach (integrating morality with social and environmental concerns) found among environmentally active faith-based organizations along with a growing willingness collaborate through interfaith or interdenominational coalitions as key opportunities.

Several things stand out when we look at these various studies together (see Table 2.1). First, theology can be both an obstacle and an opportunity. Various forms of eschatology, spirituality, and distrust of science were reported as barriers in several of the studies. Along with this, several of the studies noted that a lack of scientific literacy created roadblocks. Third, overall organizational capacity is critical. While some studies found that potential engagement in environmental initiatives was hindered by a shrinking constituency and lack of funds, others noted that the administrative experience and willingness to collaborate were key resources these faith-based groups could use.

These studies done by Nche (2020a) and Haluza-Delay (2008) stand out from the rest on the basis of their comprehensive approach. The barriers/bridges described by Nche is similar to the framework put forward by Haluza-Delay, which serves as a guide for this study. Like Haluza-Delay, Nche also shows a commendable facility in the theological linguistic world of his study subjects. However, Nche's barriers/bridges framework is specific to the problem of climate action. That factor, combined with the geographic locus and method of Haluza-Delay's study, make the latter more relevant to the research question driving my own research.

The study outlined here adds to the growing body of scholarship reviewed above by contributing to our understanding of the obstacles and opportunities experienced by Christian denominations and humanitarian agencies in Canada relative to their engagement in environmental initiatives. The social scientific methodology at the core of this project and the focus on organizations in

a Canadian context address gaps in the current literature. The clearly defined population and purposeful sampling, both of which are described in the next chapter, extend and constructively probe the analysis done by Haluza-Delay (2008) more than a decade ago. The present study, then, enhances our understanding of the key factors affecting the engagement of a variety of Christian organizations in environmental initiatives.

**Table 2.1**

Summary of Studies Examining Obstacles and Opportunities (Barriers and Bridges) in the Context of Christian Organizations

Study	Obstacles	Opportunities
Haluza-Delay (2008)	Paradigmatic (hindering beliefs or worldviews) Applicability (lack of attention) Critical (under-analysis of current situation) Convictional (low willingness to act)	Subcultural (local social practices) Motivational (enhanced commitment) Public-theological (ability to engage public discourse)
Smith and Pulver (2009)	Ethics-based approach discourages interest in immediate/practical issues Lack of issue-based concern inhibits ability to partner with secular groups	Ability to shape values through doctrine Ethics-based approach may be especially effective over the long term Cultivation of community
Moyer, Sinclair & Spaling (2011)	Faith-based identity of organization prompts some beneficiaries to expect handouts Projects must be approved by church leaders Limited time, size, and funding Tensions working with non-Christian groups	Openness to incorporating conservation into faith Organizational know-how and trusted leadership acquired through churches Churches connect environmental projects to other community concerns Holistic approach (linking community, environment, and spiritual) Faith gives sense of hope
Lysack (2013)	Shrinking membership Focus on personal matters Apathy among clergy Bureaucratic structure	Empowerment model of leadership Collaboration with outside partners and other faith communities Education for improved advocacy
Nche (2020a)	Eschatological assumptions Belief in human dominion Fatalistic view of providence Inerrantist view of scripture Organized opposition Lack of scientific literacy Lack of access to funds	Concept of stewardship Potential to increase scientific literacy Develop strategic engagement Increase fundraising
Mucunguzi et al. (2021)	Inadequate scientific knowledge for practical projects Negative attitudes of local communities Inadequate funding and fundraising skills Insufficient supply of indigenous trees	Good networking and administrative capabilities
Moyer and Brandenburg (2021)	Belief in human supremacy Focus on spiritual salvation Distrust of science Membership is shrinking and aging Declining revenue	Potential involvement of immigrant groups Holistic approach Increased willingness to collaborate

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHOD

This study was focused on the obstacles and opportunities experienced by Canadian, Christian denominations and humanitarian agencies relative to their engagement in environmental initiatives. It used a qualitative study method and the existing obstacles/opportunities framework developed by Haluza-Delay (2008) to explore this subject. The literature reviewed in the previous chapter gives evidence that many dynamics are at play in environmental values and practices of religious organizations. As noted, some faith-based organizations have been created specifically with pro-environmental mandates, while others refrain from involvement in environmental initiatives because their mission, for one reason or another, precludes such work. The focus of this study was not on these foundational dynamics. Instead, it sought to engage with representatives of Canadian, Christian denominations and humanitarian agencies to more clearly identify and understand the relevant obstacles and opportunities experienced by these organizations.

#### **Research Design**

Seeking to better understand the obstacles and opportunities experienced by Canadian, Christian denominations and humanitarian agencies relative to their engagement in environmental initiatives naturally lends itself to a qualitative form of study. As Guest et al. (2013) note, one of the defining features of qualitative research is an open-ended, inductive style of inquiry that allows the researcher to probe initial responses and uncover more complex dynamics. For that reason, the central research method used in this study was in-depth interviews conducted with knowledgeable representatives of denominations and humanitarian agencies. These in-depth interviews allowed me to ask about the obstacles and opportunities these organizations encountered with respect to their engagement in environmental initiatives. The in-depth interview is well-suited for study participants with a deep knowledge of the subject and is a good approach for exploring “why” questions, like the one

that prompts this study (Guest et al., 2013). “At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (Seidman, 2013, p. 9). It is precisely the experience of developing a programmatic portfolio, navigating the views of constituents, the needs of the wider population, and the perduring theological values of the organization, that this study sought to understand. Well-positioned interviewees could speak, not just to their own experience, but also the corporate experience of their organization.

### **Determining Study Population and Sample**

My study population included both Canadian, Christian denominations and humanitarian agencies. Though describing the population in this way might seem to be a sufficient identifier, it is not self-evident which organizations fit this description. What makes one group of churches a denomination and another a less formal network? Which humanitarian agencies operating in Canada qualify for inclusion? The matter is more complex than it first appears, not least because some groups of churches reject the “denominational” identity on theological grounds.

#### **Study Population**

To avoid being bogged down in definitional matters, I drew on the membership lists of three Canadian Christian ecumenical networks to identify the study population. I used the denominational “members” of the Canadian Council of Churches and the denominational “affiliates” of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada to make up my denominational study population (see Table 3.1). The former tended to be mainline or traditional denominations (including Catholic and Orthodox), while the later tended to be younger and more evangelical denominations. While there is no way to say whether or not the study population comprised of the members/affiliates of these two trans-denominational organizations provides a comprehensive list of Christian religious bodies in Canada, it did include the vast majority of denominations, and these denominations likely include most Canadians who identify as Christians. The members/affiliates of either organization would have been sufficient to provide enough

participants for the study. However, purposefully including denominations from the two lists increased the diversity of the sample and the likelihood that it reflected the range of Christian denominations in Canada. The denominational population for this study is listed below (see Table 3.1).

**Table 3.1**

**Canadian, Christian Denominations included in Study Population**

<b>Denominational Affiliates: Evangelical Fellowship of Canada<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Members: Canadian Council of Churches<sup>2</sup></b>
Anglican Network in Canada	Anglican Church of Canada
Apostolic Church of Pentecost	Apostolic Catholic Church Canada
Associated Gospel Churches of Canada	Archdiocese of Canada of the Orthodox Church in America
Baptist General Conference of Canada	Armenian Holy Apostolic Church, Canadian Diocese
Be in Christ Church of Canada	Canadian Association for Baptist Freedoms
Canadian Assemblies of God	Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec
Canadian Baptists of Atlantic Canada	Canadian Baptists of Western Canada
Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec	Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops
Canadian Baptists of Western Canada	Canadian Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends
Canadian Church of God Ministries	Christian Church in Canada (Disciples of Christ)
Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches	Christian Reformed Church in North America – Canada
Canadian Fellowship of Churches and Ministries	The Coptic Orthodox Church of Canada
Christian Reformed Church in North America - Canada	Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church of Canada
Church of the Nazarene Canada	Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada
Congregational Christian Churches in Canada	Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Canada
Evangelical Free Church of Canada	Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church (Northeast American Diocese)
Evangelical Mennonite Conference	The Mar Thoma Syrian Church
Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference	Mennonite Church Canada
Evangelical Missionary Church of Canada	The Presbyterian Church in Canada
Fellowship of Christian Assemblies of Canada	Regional Synod of Canada – Reformed Church in America
Fellowship of Evangelical Bible Churches	The Salvation Army
Foursquare Gospel Church of Canada	Ukrainian Catholic Church
Grace Communion International Canada	Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada
Grace Fellowship Canada	The United Church of Canada
Independent Assemblies of God International Canada	
l'Eglise reformee du Quebec	
Lutheran Church-Canada	
Menno Church Canada	
Pentecostal Assemblies of Newfoundland and Labrador	
Regional Synod of Canada (Reformed Church in America)	
The Anglican Catholic Church of Canada	
The Canadian Eastern Presbytery of the Korean	
Presbyterian Church Abroad	
The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada	
The Evangelical Christian Church in Canada (Disciples)	
The Evangelical Covenant Church of Canada	
The Fellowship (Evangelical Baptist)	
The Free Methodist Church in Canada	
Pentecostal Assemblies Of Canada	
The Pent. Holiness Church of Canada	
The Salvation Army	
The United Brethren Church in Canada	
The Wesleyan Church of Canada	
Union d'eglises baptistes francophones du Canada	
Vineyard Canada	
Vision Ministries Canada	

**Notes.**

1. Does not include denominations with observer status.
2. Does not include associate members or denominations with observer status.

The second component of the study population was comprised of Canadian, Christian humanitarian agencies. To get a sense of the potential complexity of identifying agencies that met these qualifications it is useful to note that the Canadian Centre for Christian Charities reported that it had 3,300 members (Canadian Council of Christian Charities, 2021). While that list certainly includes many organizations that would not meet the criteria for inclusion in this study (e.g., schools and local social support agencies) the work of many of the mission agencies is more difficult to discern. Because the research question is prompted by the global nature of the ecological crisis, it was important to study Christian organizations that met the criteria of carrying out humanitarian work on an international scale. To ensure that these criteria were met, I used the list of member agencies of Canadian Foodgrains Bank as the population for this part of the study. This choice ensured that study participants represented agencies that were Canadian and actively involved in international humanitarian work. According to the website of Canadian Foodgrains Bank, its member agencies represent almost 30 Canadian, Christian denominations (Canadian Foodgrains Bank, 2020). Some of the member agencies represent multiple denominations. The list of these denominations is notable in its variety, including both Pentecostals and Presbyterians (to pick two members that happen to start with the letter 'p'). Using this list allowed for the creation of a purposefully diverse sample. The humanitarian agencies included in the study population are listed below (see Table 3.2).

## **Sample Studied**

### *Denominations Sample*

I used purposive sampling to select study participants from the population of Canadian, Christian denominations identified as members of the Canadian Council of Churches or denominational affiliates of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. Since contact information for these organizations is

**Table 3.2**

Canadian, Christian Humanitarian Agencies Included in Study Population

<b>Canadian Foodgrains Bank Member Churches and Agencies</b>
Adventist Development and Relief Agency
Canadian Baptist Ministries
Canadian Lutheran Word Relief
The Christian and Missionary Alliance
Development and Peace - Caritas Canada (Roman Catholic)
Emergency Relief and Development Overseas (Pentecostal)
Evangelical Missionary Church of Canada
Mennonite Central Committee
Nazarene Compassionate Ministries
Presbyterian World Service and Development
Primates World Relief and Development Fund (Anglican)
The Salvation Army
The United Church of Canada
Tearfund Canada
World Renew (Reformed)

readily available on the internet, there was no need to interview any individuals I knew personally or to privilege denominations with which I had prior familiarity. However, in two cases I asked a prior contact to recommend someone within a particular denomination. Using purposive sampling allowed me to enhance the diversity of the denominations studied and make sure several of the largest denominations were included (Seidman, 2013). I selected 75% of the denominations from the membership of the Canadian Council of Churches and 25% from denominations affiliated with the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. This relative percentage approximated the makeup of the Canadian Christian population as determined by the 2011 National Household Survey, which is the most recent to include data on religious affiliation.

Since the question driving this study related to obstacles and opportunities encountered in environmental initiatives, denominations were selected to ensure the inclusion of at least one from each traditional ecclesial polity type. The differences between these polity types are not absolute, but in

general, denominations with an episcopal polity are governed by their bishops; those with a presbyterian polity are governed by elected elders, some but not all of whom preach or administer the sacraments; and denominations with a congregational polity consist of individual congregations governing themselves (McFarland, 2011). Coupled with the differences in denominational affiliation/membership outlined above, these variances in ecclesial polity also enhanced the theological diversity within the sample. Ecclesial polity is derived from core theological convictions about the identity and constitution of the church and are necessarily connected to how decisions about outward-facing initiatives (e.g., mission or service projects) are made. I was curious to see if these ecclesial differences might map onto differences in obstacles or opportunities related to engagement in environmental initiatives.

In addition to the objective criteria outlined above, I chose to include denominations that were relatively large (to the extent data were available) and those that provided additional theological diversity. For example, though representatives of several Pentecostal denominations declined to participate in the study, I thought it was important to persist in recruiting participation from a denomination with theological similarities. And, though representatives of one of Canada's largest denominations declined to participate, those of two similarly sized denominations did.

Representatives of eight Canadian, Christian denominations were included in this study and, as I will explain below, eight humanitarian agencies. Seidmen (2013) has proposed that the sample size for in-depth interviews should be large enough to sufficiently reflect the diversity of the population and achieve saturation of information. Guest et al. (2013) are more specific, saying that when populations are relatively homogenous and the research questions are not highly complex, a sample size with as few as six individuals can achieve theoretical saturation. Notwithstanding the risks Sim et al. (2018) articulate with an *a priori* determination of sample size, the chosen sample size of sixteen (eight denominations and eight humanitarian agencies) met the criteria set out by Sandelowski (1995) and

Seidman (2013) for achieving enough variation to explore the obstacles/opportunities framework, while being small enough to permit the deep conversations that the research question and method required.

One of the challenges, frequently noted in guides to conducting in-depth interviews (e.g., Seidman, 2013), was making contact with participants. Initially eight denominations were contacted by email. Despite the fact that not all denominations initially contacted by email responded positively to the invitation to participate in the study, the population was sufficiently large so that replacements could be identified and contacted. In all, thirteen denominations were contacted in order to identify eight willing participants. The majority of the denominational representatives who participated in the study had positions in their respective national offices. Many were programme directors or held similar positions. However, three of the denominations did not have national-level programming. Two of these denominations had episcopal polities, while one was congregational. In these cases, interviewees with substantial knowledge of the denomination and relevant regional programming were identified by denominational representatives. One was a pastor, another a diocesan program coordinator and church consultant, and a third was a prominent scholar identified as an expert in the history and life of the denomination. Both Protestant and Catholic representatives participated, as well as representatives of historic denominations and newer evangelical ones. To pick one point of diversity: some denominations encouraged the ordination of women in all ecclesial roles, while others did not. Since participants were assured that their involvement in the study would remain confidential, I will not say much more about the makeup of the sample at this stage (some details that will not compromise the anonymity of participants will be shared in the following chapter). The affiliation/membership and polity of the denominational study participants is provided below (see Table 3.3).

**Table 3.3**

## Profile of Denominations Included in Sample

Participant ID	Affiliation	Ecclesial Polity
1A	CCC	presbyterian
1B	CCC/EFC	presbyterian
1C	CCC	episcopal
1D	EFC	congregational
1E	CCC	episcopal
1F	CCC	episcopal
1G	EFC	congregational
1H	CCC	episcopal

Note. CCC = Canadian Council of Churches; EFC = Evangelical Fellowship of Canada

*Humanitarian Agencies Sample*

The development of the sample of humanitarian agencies was similar to that of the denominations, with the exception that all participants were selected from the membership of Canadian Foodgrains Bank. As with the denominations studied, these organizations were selected to ensure the inclusion of at least one with a constituency from each traditional ecclesial type (i.e., episcopal, presbyterian, and congregational).

Eight individuals representing different member agencies were interviewed for this part of the study. This number of interviewees provided enough variation to explore the obstacles/opportunities framework, while permitting the depth of conversation the research question and method required. The rationale here is the same as that given above for the denominational participants. Three agencies initially contacted declined to participate, which meant that eleven agencies were contacted in total. The communication exchanged with these agencies suggests that they were better prepared to field outside inquiries, especially from researchers, than were the denominations. The polity of the constituent denominations of the humanitarian agencies is provided below (see Table 3.4).

**Table 3.4**

## Profile of Humanitarian Agencies Included in Sample

Participant ID	Affiliation	Ecclesial Polity of Constituent Denomination(s)
2A	CFGB	congregational (supported by several historically related denominations sharing the same polity)
2B	CFGB	presbyterian
2C	CFGB	episcopal
2D	CFGB	episcopal
2E	CFGB	episcopal (essentially episcopal in structure, but ecclesial titles are not used)
2F	CFGB	congregational (supported by several historically unrelated denominations sharing a similar polity)
2G	CFGB	congregational
2H	CFGB	congregational

Note. CFGB = Canadian Foodgrains Bank

### Instrumentation

Both parts of the study sample, denominations and humanitarian agencies, were studied using the same in-depth interview format. Participants each received an Invitation to Participate in the study in advance of the interview (Appendix A), which outlined the topic and purpose of the study, and a Consent Form (Appendix B). Each participant had the opportunity to see a copy of the Interview Guide (Appendix C) in advance, but only a few requested one. This Interview Guide consisted of eleven questions drawn from Haluza-DeLay's (2008) obstacles/opportunities framework. Most of these questions were open-ended, and all were accompanied by secondary or follow-up questions. For instance, to explore potential paradigmatic obstacles, study participants were asked: "Are there specific beliefs held by your organization that inhibit or encourage creation care?" The follow-up question, included in the Guide, was: "How widely do you think these beliefs are shared by your constituency?" To explore potential critical obstacles, participants were asked: "Has your organization called its constituency to act in ways that counter cultural norms?" The follow-up here was: "How successful was this?"

Toward the end of each interview, participants were also asked to describe any additional obstacles or opportunities they had not yet had a chance to share. This question was not in the

Interview Guide, which only included a similar question related to inhibiting factors. The process of interviewing and continued reflection on the research question suggested that this modification would enhance the data. Consistent with a semi-structured approach, the Interview Guide suggested that questions would not always be asked in the exact way they were worded in the Guide, which allowed for more relevant framing of questions and more efficient use of interview time.

### **Data Collection**

The sixteen interviews were scheduled for mutually agreed-upon times and conducted over a web-based video-conferencing platform (Zoom). Each interview lasted about one hour and was recorded electronically. Rough transcripts were created using a web-based computer service (Otter.ai). I checked these transcripts for accuracy by comparing them to the audio recording and simultaneously removed information from the transcript that could readily identify either the agency or the individual participant. Participants were also given the opportunity to review transcripts for accuracy. Eleven of the sixteen asked to receive a transcript for review. None of the interviewees noted inaccuracies in their transcript. The resulting transcripts were then given a generic identifier, printed, and stored securely.

### **Data Analysis**

After the interviews were completed and the transcripts were reviewed for accuracy, I read each of them again to gain an initial picture of the data. The analysis was then carried out using the Haluza-DeLay (2008) obstacles/opportunities framework. Since the initial analysis relied on this existing theory, it took the form of a directed content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2016). Hsieh and Shannon (2016) describe this form of analysis: "Sometimes, existing theory or prior research exists about a phenomenon that is incomplete or would benefit from further description. . . . The goal of a directed approach to content analysis is to validate or extend conceptually a theoretical framework or theory" (p. 1281). Following the lead of Hsieh and Shannon, responses within the transcripts were initially coded

into categories derived from the obstacles/opportunities framework. Working deductively, the initial coding focused on the obvious links created by the interview questions. Individual responses, or portions thereof, were assigned a code related to one of the obstacles or opportunities described by Haluza-Delay.

As described above, the interviews were conducted with a semi-structured approach, using mostly open-ended questions. Thus participant responses sometimes addressed obstacles or opportunities not linked directly to the question and its intended referent from the obstacles/opportunities framework. A second round of coding was done to find relevant responses throughout the transcripts, including the open-ended questions. This inductive part of the analysis allowed me to observe data that did not fit the obstacles/opportunities framework.

The guiding question for the analysis as a whole, as the “directed” analysis approach implies, was whether or not the data generated by the study supported, modified, or undermined the obstacles/opportunities framework proposed by Haluza-Delay (2008). As will be explained later, the necessity of creating additional categories not directly related to those deduced from the Haluza-Delay framework suggests that some modification to the framework is required.

After the coding was complete, I created a data table where responses were organized according to the codes assigned. This table allowed for the observation of specific links between the findings of this study and the obstacles/opportunities framework, associations between the involvement in environmental initiatives and various characteristics of denominations/agencies, as well as more general themes. A redacted summary of the data table is included as a series of general tables in the next chapter. Many of the participants spoke quite candidly about both their constituents and the obstacles and opportunities created by the theology and organizational cultural of their denomination or humanitarian agency. This candor and specificity, especially the nuanced theology and ethical reasoning used by the various constituent groups, makes it difficult to share much of the data directly

without compromising the anonymity and confidentiality of study participants. Even so, effort will be made in the following chapter to communicate the richness of the data gathered.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

This study was intended to explore the obstacles and opportunities experienced by Canadian, Christian denominations and humanitarian agencies relative to their engagement in environmental initiatives. The assumption, drawn from a substantial body of literature showing positive connections between Christian theology and pro-environmental engagement, was that there is no essential reason Christian organizations should not engage in such initiatives. Indeed, as Chapter 2 has shown, there is substantial theological literature arguing that both the Christian scriptures and theological tradition contain values, virtues, and beliefs that should generate consistent, pro-environmental behaviour. To explore the precipitating question in a focused and scholarly way, this study used the obstacles/opportunities framework developed by Haluza-Delay (2008) as a theoretical starting point. The data generated from the sixteen in-depth interviews that comprised this study was analyzed using the Haluza-Delay obstacles/opportunities framework. What follows in this chapter are the results of this analysis.

The organization of this chapter follows that of Haluza-Delay's (2008) paper. Each of the obstacles or opportunities are introduced, and the relevant results from the denominations and humanitarian agencies studied are reported. The chapter concludes with an overview of additional obstacles and opportunities that did not fit neatly into the Haluza-Delay framework. Each section below is accompanied by a table displaying a summary of the findings.

The findings reported below are based on the responses of the interview participants and have not been evaluated for accuracy against other sources. For instance, if a participant informed me that their organization had been involved in environmental initiatives for two decades, I did not seek corroborating documentation (though interviewees sometimes pointed me to such documents or relevant experts). In several cases the wording used by interviewees has been modified and some

theological concepts are described in more generic terms than those used by the respondents. In order to uphold the anonymity of participating individuals and organizations. Anonymity was particularly necessary when interviewees referred to authoritative theological texts or traditional concepts, such as the Five Marks of Mission, the authority of the Pope, Luther's theology of the cross, or any number of unique and identifiable aspects of denominational polity.

### **Types of Environmental Initiatives**

As noted earlier, one of the key features of Haluza-Delay's (2008) study was that he acquired data using an auto-ethnographic method. More specifically, he drew upon his two decades of experience engaging Christian communities by leading adult Sunday school classes, speaking to groups, developing church-based study curriculum, and engaging in dialogue with members of faith communities. The pro-environmental initiatives under analysis by Haluza-Delay were mostly educational. In contrast to his focus on congregations, my own study looked at the larger organizational structure of Canadian, Christian congregations. The sorts of environmental initiatives under consideration here were wider in scope than those studied by Haluza-Delay. The place of environmental initiatives in the work of the sample denominations and humanitarian agencies varied widely, in type, priority, and scope.

This variety notwithstanding, two general observations can be made at the outset. First, and notwithstanding the skepticism I shared on the first pages of this thesis, engagement in environmental initiatives was found to be widespread across both Canadian, Christian denominations and Canadian, Christian humanitarian agencies. However, it should be noted that not all denominations or humanitarian agencies initially contacted responded positively to the invitation to participate in the study. It is possible that some who declined to participate, did so because the denomination or humanitarian agency was not involved in any environmental initiatives. In the case of several denominations, a cursory analysis of their websites indicated that this may be the case. However,

several denominations and humanitarian agencies that declined to participate in the study listed “environmental justice” or “food security” as areas of their work. A second general observation relates to the distinction between the types of environmental initiatives of denominations compared to those of humanitarian agencies. Denominations tended to be engaged in educational or political (advocacy) initiatives. In contrast, humanitarian agencies tended to support initiatives that were more hands-on or practical, i.e., agroecology. Though individual congregations, the context of Haluza-Delay’s (2008) study, are capable of engaging in all of these types of initiatives, the difference in scale between these types of organizations may contribute to the different forms of engagement reported by participants.

### **Denominations**

My research found that all but two Canadian, Christian denominations in the sample engaged in coordinated environmental initiatives (see Table 4.1). These initiatives included public advocacy, usually coordinated by staff at the national denominational office; international humanitarian projects, usually channeled through congregations or other local organizations in the country of service; and encouraging a variety of actions at the congregational level, a process some referred to as “catalyzing.” The two denominations that lacked such coordinated environmental initiatives had few national-level projects of any variety. In one of these cases regional church leaders did engage in environmental advocacy on an ad-hoc basis, and in the other, the denomination’s humanitarian and mission arm engaged in international projects, some of which were pro-environmental in nature.

The decisions about involvement in environmental initiatives generally originated in priorities identified by either national-level assemblies or regional church leaders. Even in denominations with an episcopal polity, national-level assemblies could be a venue for change. One interviewee reported, “Particularly in the last [national assembly] the voice of the youth was really important in getting some of these [environmental] resolutions put forward. For them it is a central issue.” Within the bounds of these officially endorsed priorities, staff made decisions about what specific projects to support.

**Table 4.1****Summary of Projects and Decision-Making - Denominations**

<b>Part. ID Affiliation - Polity</b>	<b>Mission and Service Projects</b>	<b>Environmental Y/N</b>	<b>Selection of Projects</b>
1A CCC - P	Coordinate national advocacy, and support local initiatives and international partners	Yes, largely advocacy and education, e.g., seminar on greening churches, understanding watersheds	Guided by national assembly mandates, congregational concerns, and issues identified by ecumenical partners
1B CCC/EFC – P	Support refugee sponsorship, political advocacy, climate change initiatives, indigenous rights	Yes, part of common good agenda	Staff receive mandate through national assembly resolutions and regional church governance
1C CCC – E	Coordinate various initiatives through local congregations, share best practices	Yes, but initiatives are coordinated at the regional level	Guided by priorities of international church body, regional church leaders, and individual pastoral concerns
1D EFC - C	Support international churches, including related relief and development projects	Yes, integrated with gospel proclamation and primarily projects related to agriculture and water conservation/potability	Guided by national assembly decisions, national working groups, and denominational position papers
1E CCC - E	Consider mission to be primarily doxological, hospitality is key form of outreach	Not directly	Regional church leaders establish mandate informed by priorities of international church leaders, local measures are initiated by pastors or congregational committees
1F CCC - E	Coordinate projects addressing creation care, housing, justice/corrections, and responsible resource extraction	Yes	Staff take initiative within parameters established by national assembly and guided by coordinating committee
1G EFC - C	Have few collective projects, individual congregations connect with various pan-evangelical organizations	No	Decisions made by local church boards and pastors
1H CCC - E	Engage in national advocacy and encourage social action at multiple levels	Yes	National assembly establishes policies and mandates, elected leaders pursue identified priorities in dialogue with ecumenical partners

*Note.* E = episcopal; C = congregational; P = presbyterian; CCC = Canadian Council of Churches; EFC = Evangelical Fellowship of Canada

The analysis and judgment of staff was significant, as national resolutions rarely specified how the denomination would engage its chosen environmental issues. Within this general format, however, one interviewee drew attention to the complexity of decision-making in a multi-nodal organization, saying that decisions about involvement in environmental initiatives were made “top down and bottom up and also sideways.” Nevertheless, having priorities identified by official representational bodies, i.e., denominational assemblies, was particularly significant for staff when faced with criticism from

constituents who opposed the denomination's involvement in pro-environmental initiatives. One interviewee said, "Our ministries [programmes] get accused of being liberals with a social justice warrior agenda or something like that. And [based on the denominational mandate] we're like, 'No, the denomination told us to do this. Were you listening four years ago?'" Within this sample there was no clear relationship between either ecclesial polity or CCC/EFC membership/affiliation and involvement in such initiatives.

### **Humanitarian Agencies**

In the sample of Canadian, Christian international humanitarian agencies, every participant reported involvement in environmental initiatives (see Table 4.2). These agencies were generally younger than the denominations and more dynamic in the focus of their work. There were exceptions to this generality, as two agencies have existed for more than a century. The research method did not allow for precise dating of the environmental initiatives, but several interviewees reported that these began in the 1970s or 1980s. The most common initiatives were projects in agroecology, food security, and water conservation or water potability. Seven of the eight agencies worked through a partnership model, which meant that they were not direct implementers of these initiatives. The Canadian agencies raised money to fund projects run by selected local organizations in various international settings. One interviewee described it this way: "We're not direct implementers. . . . If you walked around the world, you would not see our staff. You would see our partners. We have a defined project that we work out with our partners, that could be one to three years in length. . . . They're implementing the project. We fund it. We get reports. We visit and monitor." One organization's environmental work was limited to running second-hand stores (promoting a circular economy) and a series of internal initiatives designed to reduce plastic waste and conserve energy. Within these eight agencies there was no clear

relationship between the polity of an organization's supporting denomination(s) and involvement in environmental initiatives.

**Table 4.2**

Summary of Projects and Decision-Making - Humanitarian Agencies

Part. ID Affiliation - Polity	Mission and Service Projects	Enviro. Initiatives	Selection of Initiatives
2A CFGB - C	Fund projects in peacebuilding, education, disaster relief, health, and water sanitation; participate in coalitions on various advocacy and development projects	Yes, primarily agroecology, afforestation, and water conservation	Use partnership model, guided by strategic plan established by board (populated by denominational representatives); consider existing sectoral work in region, partner capacity, and governance; prioritize needs identified by long-term regional partners
2B CFGB - P	Fund projects related to food security, emergency relief, small-scale farming; participate in coalitions on various advocacy and development projects	Yes, primarily agricultural projects, e.g., food security and climate change adaptation	Use partnership model, guided by needs identified by regional partners; proposed projects vetted against agency mandate, available resources, and ability to explain choices to constituents
2C CFGB - E	Fund projects addressing financial inequality, women's vulnerability, democratic process, justice, ecological justice; support peasant movements; educate Canadians on root causes of inequality	Yes, ecological justice is focal area	Use partnership model, new partners carefully assessed; proposed projects considered in light of contextual analysis done by staff; independent board includes denominational leaders; agency relies on regional church leaders for permission to raise funds in churches
2D CFGB - E	Fund projects addressing food insecurity, climate change adaptation, preventative healthcare, human displacement, emergency relief, women's empowerment, and indigenous communities	Yes, considered a cross-cutting concern, also support agroecology	Use partnership model, led by board of directors and strategic plan (established by staff and board); staff work with partners to create project proposals; project review committee evaluates proposals against strategic plan
2E CFGB - E	Run various projects in Canada and around the world intended to assist those in need of basic necessities, e.g., provide potable water	Yes, operate second-hand stores, pursue (limited) internal initiatives related to waste and energy use	Board of global office makes decisions on international projects based on needs and available funds
2F CFGB - C	Fund projects related to food security and conservation agriculture; most projects involve church-based training, adult education, and technical support	Yes, but are hesitant to use environmental language	Use partnership model, work with established partners
2G CFGB - C	Fund projects addressing relief and development, e.g., food security	Yes, especially conservation agriculture	Use partnership model, driven by partner concerns
2H CFGB - C	Fund projects addressing disaster relief, community development, and education; seek to build partner capacity	Yes, but limited to agriculture	Use partnership model; evaluation process not codified, but generally involves analysis of need, available partners, and funding

Note. E = episcopal; C = congregational; P = presbyterian; CFGB = Canadian Foodgrains Bank

### **Obstacles to Involvement in Environmental Initiatives**

As noted in the previous chapter, because the research method used semi-formal interviews, the questions used in each interview were not identical. The general format used in the interviews can be found in the interview guide (Appendix C). However, interviewees tended to give long answers to initial questions that included information relevant to subsequent questions. Therefore, it was not a surprise when the analysis showed that questions sometimes elicited responses pertinent to other questions and to related obstacles or opportunities. This tendency meant that responses were not always comparable and sometimes were given in terms more or less clearly related to the theoretical obstacles or opportunities. Though the results reported below are given in a sequence following Haluza-Delay's (2008) original article and the interview guide used for my own study, the results are summaries of relevant information provided in an interview as a whole. This relevant information was identified during the coding process.

### **Paradigmatic Obstacles**

Haluza-Delay (2008) describes paradigmatic obstacles as "those elements of theological beliefs or worldviews that disable attention to environmental concerns" (p. 74). Interview participants were generally asked to identify beliefs that held particular significance, either positive or negative, for involvement in environmental initiatives. Therefore, the results reported below encompass potential paradigmatic opportunities as well as paradigmatic obstacles.

### **Denominations**

Paradigmatic factors varied amongst denominations (see Table 4.3). As one might expect, denominations with theologies that tend toward the pietistic reported that their involvement in environmental initiatives was of more recent origin. Pietism is a stream of Christian theology and practice that emphasizes inward experience and individual moral purity. Pietism is historically identified with reform movements arising within Lutheranism as well as with the Wesleyan tradition (O'Malley,

2010). However, in contemporary Christianity pietism can be identified in a wide variety of denominations and broader trends in worship and spirituality. Denominations with limited involvement in environmental initiatives tended to identify faith as something that was primarily inward or liturgical in character. However, this understanding was nuanced by one interviewee as follows: “The primary character of our mission is doxological. The most important missionary activity we can have is to worship God. . . . And this actually bears witness to all creation, because a very important part of our worship is the sanctification of creation.” Denominations that reported theological commitments that extended beyond the individual, reported more longstanding involvement in environmental initiatives. These denominational representatives described the paradigmatic basis of their denomination’s environmental initiatives as stewardship, justice, service to all of creation, valuing all life, or good citizenship. The beliefs professed by these denominations, though varying in specifics, encouraged constituents to practice their faith in a way that contributed to the common good.

Three interviewees reported that certain theological beliefs inhibited their denomination’s involvement in environmental initiatives. One was the belief that the Christian message was primarily about spiritual healing. Another reported that some constituents had such a high view of God’s providence that they believed God would either act to address the environmental crisis or it was God’s will that the environmental crisis would destroy the earth. A third inhibiting belief was a strong value of the freedom of local congregations, such that cooperation on large-scale projects was nearly impossible. On this last point it is worth noting that other denominations with essentially the same congregational polity did report involvement in environmental initiatives. This final paradigmatic obstacle, then, is probably not ecclesial polity itself but a related bias against cooperative action outside the congregation.

One noteworthy denomination appeared to be going through a transformation in its theology. The transformation was said to be catalyzed by leaders emphasizing a “holistic gospel.”

**Table 4.3**

## Summary of Paradigmatic Factors - Denominations

Part. ID Affiliation - Polity	Paradigmatic Factors
1A CCC - P	Positive: Mandate to seek justice and give voice to voiceless Negative: Reject stewardship language
1B CCC/EFC – P	Positive: Affirm creational stewardship mandate, earth belongs to God, value education and critical thinking, common good/grace theology, value justice highly
1C CCC – E	Positive: Affirm care for creation as everyone’s responsibility, all of life has value, love of neighbour includes care for creation, care for poor involves care for the earth
1D EFC - C	Positive: Affirm redemption involves healing creation, holistic vision of gospel links social and spiritual concerns Negative: Traditional theology focuses on ‘spiritual’ matters
1E CCC - E	Positive: Creation given to humanity as gift for stewardship and communion; sin is rejection of God’s gift, human vocation is to heal and bless like Jesus, church exists to serve the wider world and creation
1F CCC - E	Positive: Caring for creation considered part of mission by international church Negative: Programs and theological emphasis are specific to regional bodies
1G EFC - C	Negative: Value freedom and congregational discernment, worry that environmental issues are connected to pantheism
1H CCC - E	Positive: Theological value of citizenship and love for all, baptism and communion are central, ongoing confession and experience of divine grace, reconciliation is key concept Negative: Trust in providence and divine initiative crowded out need for human action

Note. E = episcopal; C = congregational; P = presbyterian; CCC = Canadian Council of Churches; EFC = Evangelical Fellowship of Canada

This theological vision was an attempt to transform an older zeal for church-planting and evangelism into a view of Christian mission that married spiritual, physical, and social reconciliation. The origins of this transformation were described this way:

Obviously, as an evangelical denomination, we’ve been really good at evangelism and leadership training. About 17 or 18 years ago our [national leader] said, “You know, we really have to reevaluate our understanding of the gospel. It’s not just a spiritual salvation. There’s way more than that.” We, as a denomination, want to elevate the priority of justice, of Christ’s reconciling work in all that’s broken. . . . The redemptive work of Christ involves healing all of creation that was broken.

As will be noted later, a similar transformation was evident in several humanitarian agencies. That this sort of transformation was linked to new involvement in environmental initiatives confirms the responses of participants who described how their denomination's involvement in environmental initiatives was limited by a theology of mission with a narrow focus on church planting and inward spiritual renewal. Such a narrow view of Christian mission precluded involvement in environmental initiatives.

### **Humanitarian Agencies**

Given the link between human wellbeing and environmental wellbeing, it is not surprising that all the humanitarian agencies engaged in environmental initiatives (see Table 4.4). Furthermore, the link that all these organizations share with Canadian Foodgrains Bank implies their involvement in agricultural and food security projects. These sorts of projects have an inherent biophysical link to environmental matters. As faith-based organizations, each member of this sample felt the need to provide a theological rationale for their work. The key beliefs reported by study participants included the belief that the Bible calls Christians to pursue justice, a biblical mandate to care for the earth, a desire to uphold the biblical covenant of stewarding the earth, sharing God's love with those who are vulnerable, and a "holistic" understanding of mission. Several study participants articulated more developed social theologies derived from a particular denomination or theological tradition.

As in the denominations portion of the sample, several of these agencies reported undergoing a transformation in their understanding of mission. These agencies shifted toward a theology of "integral mission" or "holistic mission." The term "integral mission" is drawn from the global evangelical network of mission agencies known as the Lausanne Movement. The next chapter will discuss this influence in more detail.

For humanitarian agencies included in the sample, beliefs appeared to function more positively than negatively with respect to involvement in environmental initiatives. It is notable that organizations

with Catholic or Orthodox, Christian constituencies appeared to be less hampered by the biblical literalism that predisposes some Protestants toward a skepticism of science and the subsequent rejection of climate science. In the instances where respondents described beliefs as obstacles, it was mostly in the form of constituents' worry that the agency was dabbling in paganism or earth worship. This obstacle was reported by two interviewees. One described how his agency had pulled one of its curricular resources from circulation because some constituents pointed to it as an example of the agency's latent pantheism. As would be expected, the agencies undergoing a theological transition reported that some constituents remained skeptical of the new "integral" approach to mission and maintained a view that evangelism, church-planting, and other spiritual agenda were a distinct and superior form of mission. It should be noted that no denominations or humanitarian agencies reported transitioning away from a theology of mission that included social and environmental concerns.

**Table 4.4**

Summary of Paradigmatic Factors - Humanitarian Agencies

Part. ID Affiliation - Polity	Paradigmatic Factors
2A CFGB - C	Positive: Value simple living, peace, and right relationship with God, others, and creation Negative: Eschatology that devalues long-term future of the earth
2B CFGB - P	Positive: Value justice, living out faith, supporting international partners is part of being community
2C CFGB - E	Positive: Affirm connection between poverty and environmental crisis, social teaching is deeply integrated into church doctrine, have not embraced anti-science fundamentalism
2D CFGB - E	Positive: Environmental issues formally affirmed as part of mission, value keeping covenant
2E CFGB - E	Positive: Newly embraced vision for creation care as sharing Jesus' love for all
2F CFGB - C	Positive: Newly embraced vision of holistic mission prompted by partners in global South
2G CFGB - C	Positive: Recently embraced vision of integral mission that links social and spiritual concerns Negative: Some partners reject inclusion of creation care in mission mandate
2H CFGB - C	Positive: Humanitarian work is motivated by biblical commands Negative: Humanitarian work not inclusive of environmental initiatives

Note. E = episcopal; C = congregational; P = presbyterian; CFGB = Canadian Foodgrains Bank

### **Applicability Obstacles**

A second set of obstacles identified by Haluza-Delay (2008) relate to applicability. He describes applicability obstacles as “conflicts over the appropriate amount of attention to give environmental concerns” (p. 75). While these sorts of obstacles could relate to the idea that faith is primarily a private, spiritual matter, the category is also intended to encompass the belief that human social concerns are distinct from and more important than environmental issues. To elicit information on this potential obstacle, participants were asked to describe the priority of environmental projects for their agency relative to other potential forms of mission or service and the extent to which this ranking has changed in recent decades.

### **Denominations**

Two interviewees reported that environmental initiatives were not more widely taken up across the denomination because many believed evangelism or “saving souls” was more important. One participant said environmental matters were a “low-level concern” in his denomination. Another said that some constituents worried that environmental initiatives were coming at the expense of a concerted opposition to abortion. Though several study participants reported that environmental concerns had become more important for constituents in recent years, one raised a different view, saying that in her context environmental matters were considered a higher priority in the 1980s. She said that attention given to justice issues had declined due to revelations of the church’s role in Residential Schools and a conservative cultural mood in the 1990s and early 2000s. As indicated above, one of the denominations in the sample appeared to be going through a transition in which they were beginning to identify a wider range of projects as part of their mission. This change of belief impacted the view of how important or applicable environmental initiatives should be. Though environmental issues are part of the mission portfolio of most of the denominations, they still appear to hold less of a priority than human social or spiritual concerns (see Table 4.5).

**Table 4.5**

## Summary of Applicability Obstacles - Denominations

Part. ID Affiliation - Polity	Applicability Obstacles
1A CCC - P	Environment has been key issue for denomination since 1980s
1B CCC/EFC – P	Priority given to environmental issues has increased lately
1C CCC – E	Statement by international church leadership has increased importance of environmental issues, concern remains that it will take focus away from other issues
1D EFC - C	Recent development of understanding gospel as inclusive of social issues has raised importance of environmental issues
1E CCC - E	High value of creation present in denomination for a long time
1F CCC - E	Youth have raised priority of environmental issues recently, leaders now speaking about related issues more openly
1G EFC - C	Environmental issues rank below most other forms of mission
1H CCC - E	Environmental issues have been on the agenda since 1980s, now growing in importance

Note. E = episcopal; C = congregational; P = presbyterian; CCC = Canadian Council of Churches; EFC = Evangelical Fellowship of Canada

**Humanitarian Agencies**

Within the humanitarian agencies included in the sample, four reported that environmental initiatives have been a part of their work for more than two decades (see Table 4.6). Two of these agencies have been significantly involved in food security. A third has run second-hand stores. Two other agencies reported that environmental initiatives have increased in priority in the past two decades. These two agencies have expanded their mandate to include environmental initiatives because their partners in the global South reported that these initiatives were needed. One interviewee described being in attendance at a service in Kenya to celebrate the translation of the Bible into a local language. A national church leader expressed thanks for the new translation because it would enable local Christians to get beyond the gospel taught by Western missionaries, which the Kenyan leader said was “too small.” The gospel that had been taught was “about the future” and didn’t teach people how

to live well in the present. The agency’s expanded support for projects that addressed poverty and food insecurity was a response to that charge.

It is notable that all the agencies, to varying degrees, reported that they needed to be cautious about how they identified their environmental initiatives to their Canadian constituents. One study participant put it this way: “[Our] western board members have been reticent for us to be known as a climate change organization, but they’re comfortable with us doing climate mitigation or family resilience [projects related] to those things—climate adaptation.” Though people who donate to a Christian humanitarian organization may want to help subsistence farmers in the global South deal with unpredictable weather patterns, they do not want to hear that these newly unpredictable weather patterns are a result of climate change. Though the service end of the project was the same, the sense of priority for donors shifted depending on how the situation was described.

**Table 4.6**

Summary of Applicability Obstacles - Humanitarian Agencies

Part. ID Affiliation - Polity	Applicability Obstacles
2A CFGB - C	Environmental projects have been part of organization’s work for decades; climate change adaptation is part of internal discussions, but not yet part of external communication; agricultural work has shifted to agroecology
2B CFGB - P	Involved in agricultural projects for more than two decades, environmental projects must be linked to promotion of human wellbeing
2C CFGB - E	Involved in agricultural work since 1980s
2D CFGB - E	Caring for creation ranked comparably to other mission priorities
2E CFGB - E	Second-hand stores are longstanding program, internal environmental policies are recent development
2F CFGB - C	Environmental matters are an increasing priority and viewed as one of several results of broken relationships
2G CFGB - C	Priority of environmental matters is increasing, as prompted by global partners and newly integrated theological vision
2H CFGB - C	Environmental matters have been and remain a low priority

Note. E = episcopal; C = congregational; P = presbyterian; CFGB = Canadian Foodgrains Bank

### **Critical Obstacles**

A third set of obstacles identified by Haluza-Delay (2008) were critical obstacles. Critical obstacles are “those that result from underanalysis of societal and cultural factors that affect the human-earth relationship” (p. 75). As with each set of obstacles, there is some overlap between this and other categories. What makes critical obstacles particularly challenging for religious communities is that, as Haluza-Delay points out, sometimes cultural values are believed to be transcultural religious values. In addition, sometimes members of religious communities fail to see how their reading of sacred texts is influenced by the historical and social context of their hermeneutical community. A hermeneutical community in this case is the network of textual interpreters that influence a Christian’s reading and application of the Bible. It would include, but not be limited to, a congregation. To combat this confusion, hermeneutical communities require critical awareness of their own cultural situatedness. When critical awareness is lacking, faith communities are unable to adequately evaluate their own beliefs and practices. To elicit information relevant to this theoretical obstacle, study participants were asked to describe how their organization’s choices were shaped by its social context.

### **Denominations**

The most apparent critical obstacle described by denominational participants was the impact of political divisions and economic interests (see Table 4.7). Six of the eight participants in the denominational component of the sample reported that the environmental initiatives of their denomination were held in check by constituents in parts of the country where the economy was dominated by resource extraction, especially oil and natural gas. The heavy reliance of agrobusiness on fossil fuels and their related vulnerability to price increases (i.e., a carbon levy) was also mentioned in this context. One interviewee reported that constituents involved in these sectors felt “abandoned by their church” when the denomination advocated for a reduction in use of fossil fuels. Denominational leaders responded to this concern by emphasizing the importance of a “just transition” in the economic

departure from fossil fuels and by being careful with the language they used. For instance, one leader shared that denominational communication referred to “the changing climate” instead of “climate change.” The common term “climate change” was understood by constituents to be an affirmation of the anthropogenic roots of the problem, while “the changing climate” was understood to indicate agnosticism about the cause of the problem. Speaking about “the changing climate” allowed this denomination to talk about the difficult situation faced by some subsistence farmers in the global South, while disassociating that difficulty from the charged political discourse around climate change. Interviewees also reported frustration at the impact of populism and political partisanship. One expressed bewilderment at the propensity of Canadian pastors to address U.S. political issues in sermons. He saw these cross-border references as examples of political partisanship imported unnecessarily.

**Table 4.7**

Summary of Critical Obstacles - Denominations

Part. ID Affiliation - Polity	Critical Obstacles
1A CCC - P	High value placed on political analysis and engagement
1B CCC/EFC – P	Key recognition that some constituents depend on resource extraction economy (e.g., oil and gas)
1C CCC – E	Recognize challenges of populism and constituents who depend on resource extraction
1D EFC - C	Constituent pastors frustrated by work on climate change, denomination avoids topic of climate change out of fear of losing donors
1E CCC - E	Acknowledge challenge of addressing constituents who depend on resource extraction economy
1F CCC - E	Regions dependent upon resource extraction economy feel abandoned when denomination engages in environmental issues
1G EFC - C	Constituents worry that creation care compromises business profitability, theological leaders occupied with old debates
1H CCC - E	Recognize political divisions shape conversation

Note. E = episcopal; C = congregational; P = presbyterian; CCC = Canadian Council of Churches; EFC = Evangelical Fellowship of Canada

### **Humanitarian Agencies**

Two types of responses stood out from the humanitarian agencies included in the study sample (see Table 4.8). The first was the impact of the connections these agencies have with partners from the global South. As noted above, most of these agencies worked with a “partnership model” of development, where they vetted and financed development projects run by local agencies based in the global South. Interviewees reported that the types of projects proposed and the needs identified by these partners shifted the strategic plans of their agencies and were a key factor in the choices these agencies made about projects. The influence of partners from the global South upon these agencies led to the second readily identifiable theme, which is the educational role taken on by many of these agencies. In order to generate and sustain support from Canadian constituents, agencies shared stories from their project partners in the global South. For instance, several referenced sharing stories about the challenges faced by subsistence farmers with constituent congregations. One interviewee described going to congregations and explaining the work of his agency in Guatemala. “It’s an education component. So personally, I don’t go asking for donations. I share a story.” Stories like these served to both reassure donors that their support was having an impact and, more subtly in most cases, educate Canadian constituents about the impact of climate change among individuals living with greater dependence upon natural systems.

### **Convictional Obstacles**

A fourth set of obstacles to faith-based environmental engagement are described as convictional obstacles. Haluza-Delay (2008) describes these as “barriers on the level of lifestyle and willingness to act” (p. 76). These obstacles are not unique for religious communities, and multiple interviewees spoke of their personal struggle to live in an environmentally sensible way. One study participant reported that the aspect of his life that expanded his carbon footprint the most was the travel required by working for a humanitarian agency.

**Table 4.8****Summary of Critical Obstacles - Humanitarian Agencies**

<b>Part. ID Affiliation - Polity</b>	<b>Critical Obstacles</b>
2A CFGB - C	View creation care as an abstract concept, focus on providing practical help to vulnerable persons, environmental work is contested by rural constituents
2B CFGB - P	Disasters in the news trigger donor interest, increasing awareness of environmental issues among constituents
2C CFGB - E	Believe educational mandate includes making constituents aware of global impact of consumption, environmental issues are not highly politicized due to immigrant constituency
2D CFGB - E	Realize constituents, not beneficiaries, contribute to climate change; avoid political matters because of constituent dependence on resource extraction (e.g., oil and gas); growing awareness of environmental issues in society raises priority among constituents
2E CFGB - E	Growing concern over environmental matters in wider culture has prompted internal initiatives
2F CFGB - C	Experience disparity between environmental concerns of global partners and reluctance of board members from western Canada, climate change is flashpoint with constituents dependent on resource extraction (e.g., oil and gas)
2G CFGB - C	Experience tension between environmental concerns of global partners and reluctant socially conservative donors, believe political polarization is harmful to fulfilling mandate
2H CFGB - C	Donations often driven by disasters reported in news, link to Canadian Foodgrains Bank limits recognition of climate change, deliberately avoid references to climate change adaptation

*Note.* E = episcopal; C = congregational; P = presbyterian; CFGB = Canadian Foodgrains Bank

To elicit information relevant to potential convictional obstacles, study participants were asked if their organization called constituents to act in ways that countered cultural norms. Subsequent conversation often explored whether or not the idea of being “counter-cultural” was viewed positively or negatively by their constituents.

### **Denominations**

The denominational study participants showed significant diversity in relationship to this theoretical set of obstacles (see Table 4.9). Differences appeared to stem largely from a denomination’s historical relationship to the dominant forces in Canadian society. In decades past some denominations were primary shapers of Canadian culture. Interviewees from these denominations observed that their constituents were not likely to be motivated by a call to counter cultural norms. Similarly, some

interviewees communicated that their denominational theology assumed the church had a culture-shaping role, even though the denomination now lacked the influence to do so. On the other hand, one denominational leader identified the concept of “discipleship,” i.e., following Jesus, as one regularly used to counter barriers of conviction. Barriers of lifestyle-entrenchment and the difficulty of change were reported by representatives of all these denominations. It was not possible to determine in what way religious commitments may have contributed to this challenge. For instance, one interviewee reported that many of her colleagues and constituents were so committed to addressing injustice that they risked being emotionally overwhelmed. Did faith sustain them in their counter-cultural justice work or push them toward burnout? The answer was unclear.

**Table 4.9**

Summary of Convictional Obstacles - Denominations

Part. ID Affiliation - Polity	Convictional Obstacles
1A CCC - P	Being counter-cultural is a fear not a positive motivation
1B CCC/EFC – P	Interested in shaping culture
1C CCC – E	Being counter-cultural is a positive motivation
1D EFC - C	Conservative constituents value being counter-cultural
1E CCC - E	Historically insular in Canada, some anecdotal examples of counter-cultural advocacy from pastors but larger context is unclear
1F CCC - E	Have been culturally dominant, value having a unique perspective on politics
1G EFC - C	Pockets of the denomination value being counter-cultural, but this is not widespread enough to indicate convictional significance
1H CCC - E	Theological concept of discipleship provides some counter-cultural leverage

Note. E = episcopal; C = congregational; P = presbyterian; CCC = Canadian Council of Churches; EFC = Evangelical Fellowship of Canada

## Humanitarian Agencies

Participants representing humanitarian agencies often described their constituents as being conflicted over a desire to support humanitarian work, while being reluctant to consider changing a personal lifestyle that contributed to the climate crisis (see Table 4.10). Several participants shared how the stories of their partners from the global South were key to motivating constituents to make lifestyle changes and/or provide financial support for the agency's work. One study participant described the limits of the impact of these stories by saying that the agency's board members were "chickens." The board members lacked the conviction to allow the agency to support projects identified as responses to the impacts of global climate change. Complicating matters for this humanitarian agency was the fact that some donors contributed profits from oil leases on their land to the agency's international work.

**Table 4.10**

### Summary of Convictional Obstacles - Humanitarian Agencies

Part. ID Affiliation - Polity	Convictional Obstacles
2A CFGB - C	Value simplicity, peace, and being counter-cultural
2B CFGB - P	Sharing stories of partners from global South is necessary to counter influence of dominant culture
2C CFGB - E	Strive to educate constituents about less consumptive ways of life, a non-growth view of development, and the connection between spiritual and social issues; oppose industrial agriculture (despite link to Canadian Foodgrains Bank)
2D CFGB - E	Constituent denomination was once culture-defining, recognize that going to church now feels counter-cultural
2E CFGB - E	Current environmental concerns prompted by wider culture
2F CFGB - C	Constituent dependence on resource extraction (e.g., oil and gas) in tension with experience of climate change by partners in global South, engagement in environmental initiatives limited by constituent dependence on resource extraction economy
2G CFGB - C	Recognize need to be careful when countering financial interests of constituents (e.g., oil, gas, industrial agriculture), global partners are more open to countering cultural norms than Canadian constituents
2H CFGB - C	Constituents value being counter-cultural, stories of the impact of climate change on farmers from global South are important for engaging conservative constituents

Note. E = episcopal; C = congregational; P = presbyterian; CFGB = Canadian Foodgrains Bank

Other participants described similar challenges arising from the fact that much of their support came from individuals engaged in agrobusinesses heavily dependent on fossil fuels. The involvement of large biotech/agrochemical companies in the work of Canadian Foodgrains Bank created similar convictional conundrums for some. One interviewee put it this way:

A lot of the work we do is critical of the industrial agricultural paradigm. We run campaigns against bio patenting, and we would be critical of corporations like Monsanto who are donors of CFGB [Canadian Foodgrains Bank]. So does that mean we're not going to work with CFGB because they're getting donations from Monsanto?

Clearly, not all of the agencies in this sample, or their constituencies, would see links to such companies as a convictional issue. The fact that some do illustrates the complexity of convictional obstacles. Not only do the constituents of these agencies lack the willingness to act in some cases, but they also lack clarity about which cultural norms should be critiqued. However, opportunities still existed in this area. Some agencies did recognize that their constituents valued cultural critique. One participant reported that longstanding values of simplicity, peace, love, and justice served to counter convictional barriers in constituents.

### **Opportunities**

In addition to obstacles to faith-based environmental engagement, Haluza-Delay (2008) also reported a series of opportunities. He described these as “those factors in a church environment that are favourable to effective faith-based environmental learning and responsive action” (p. 76). One of the strengths of Haluza-Delay’s paper is that the opportunities he observed are not simply the mirror opposite of the obstacles. Thus his findings were inductively derived from actual experiences and not theoretical constructions. Haluza-Delay divided the opportunities into three categories, each of which will be explored below. As the above quotation shows, Haluza-Delay specifically mentioned “environmental learning” (p. 76) as the objective of these opportunities even though the objective in the

context of the obstacles was described as “faith-based environmental engagement” (p. 74). This non-parallel structure was not applied to the opportunities explored in my study: the potential environmental initiatives in view here remain broad.

### **Subcultural Opportunities**

The first set of opportunities are described by Haluza-Delay (2008) as subcultural. Subcultural opportunities are “those social practices of congregations that lead to more effective learning occasions” (p. 76). He went on to explain that religious participation is more than simply attending a service and listening to a sermon, though sermons do represent an important opportunity for overcoming convictional obstacles. Beyond participation in religious services, involvement in a church often involves participation in a small group, church-based educational programs, as well as various formal or informal accountability structures. All of these, Haluza-Delay wrote, can be used to meet pro-environmental ends. To elicit information relevant to subcultural opportunities, study participants were asked if their organization was able to leverage a distinctive subculture of its constituents to promote engagement in the organization’s programs.

### **Denominations**

Since the interviewees from the denominational component of the sample were mostly organizational leaders, they did not speak about subcultural opportunities available in specific congregations (see Table 4.11). They were prompted to consider potential subcultural opportunities that spanned the denomination. One participant described the common experience and shared values fostered by the denomination’s value of Christian schooling. In her view, the values and social theology cultivated in denominational schools created an opportunity for increased engagement in environmental initiatives. She described the result as a “strong perspective on creational stewardship” and a “common good theology” shared across the denomination.

**Table 4.11**

## Summary of Subcultural Opportunities - Denominations

Part. ID Affiliation - Polity	Subcultural Opportunities
1A CCC - P	Some congregations are ethnically homogenous
1B CCC/EFC – P	Denomination has high level of ethnic homogeneity, beliefs and values cultivated by strong support of related educational institutions
1C CCC – E	Denomination comprised of multiple language groups, share common liturgy
1D EFC - C	Ethnic makeup varies between congregations, all value strong biblical grounding
1E CCC - E	Churches use local language, but share common liturgy
1F CCC - E	Ethnically diverse, but share common liturgy; have a history of discussing contentious issues within congregations
1G EFC - C	Congregations share an emphasis on autonomy, individual congregations may have shared social practices,
1H CCC - E	High level of ethnic homogeneity across the denomination

*Note.* E = episcopal; C = congregational; P = presbyterian; CCC = Canadian Council of Churches; EFC = Evangelical Fellowship of Canada

Several study participants explained that part of their role or that of their colleagues was to engage congregations and their pastors. This engagement occurred through formal religious services, but also through speaking opportunities linked to other parts of congregational life. Connections with pastors allowed denominational leaders to encourage value shifts and new understandings of Christian mission. Several interviewees offered descriptions of the ethnic makeup of their denominations (another aspect of a “subculture”). In all but one case, these interviewees saw no opportunity for advancing environmental initiatives based on a shared ethnic subculture.

### Humanitarian Agencies

As with the denominations included in the sample, respondents in this group struggled to identify features of a distinctive subculture that applied to their entire constituency (see Table 4.12).

**Table 4.12**

## Summary of Subcultural Opportunities - Humanitarian Agencies

Part. ID Affiliation - Polity	Subcultural Opportunities
2A CFGB - C	Participants readily identify unique subcultural features of constituency, including refugee experience, annual events supporting agency's work, church-affiliated schools, shared values
2B CFGB - P	Constituents appear to support issues on an ad-hoc basis, some participate in learning tours
2C CFGB - E	Constituency is ethnically diverse but shares a common liturgy
2D CFGB - E	Constituency shares common liturgy
2E CFGB - E	Longstanding fundraising traditions reach general population, few shared social practices
2F CFGB - C	Many constituents share rural background
2G CFGB - C	Few shared social practices, though in western Canada many share connection to agriculture, some shared history of women's action groups
2H CFGB - C	Many constituents share rural background

Note. E = episcopal; C = congregational; P = presbyterian; CFGB = Canadian Foodgrains Bank

However, two interviewees reported that their agency connected projects with the denomination's liturgical calendar, especially during the season of Lent, which has historically been a time of giving and fasting. One interviewee explained that a prominent regional church leader had developed a congregational resource for Lent that focused on creation care and climate change. Another interviewee reported that the agency he worked for benefited from a long tradition of fundraising events that had become a valued part of the constituent's subculture. These events functioned as highpoints in church life and served as opportunities for social connection.

While it is logical to assume that the churches that support these agencies have the types of subcultural activities Haluza-Delay (2008) described, these agencies were not consistently connected to long-term aspects of congregational life. Staff members from these agencies regularly spoke in churches and connected with church members through various media. As noted earlier, participants reported that

constituent congregations often welcomed agency leaders to share stories about the challenges faced by communities in other parts of the world, particularly in the global South, thereby creating a significant opportunity to explain the environmental impact of consumptive Canadian lifestyles. However, these opportunities remained largely episodic and therefore difficult to describe as subcultural opportunities.

### **Motivational Opportunities**

The second set of opportunities named by Haluza-Delay (2008) relate to motivation. Haluza-Delay described these opportunities as “those dimensions that potentially increase the effectiveness of environmental awareness because of the faith-based commitment” (p. 77). He explained further, “commitment generated in a religious context may be a powerful source of the ‘green fire’ strong enough to result in sustained effort to maintain ecologically-sensitive lifestyles” (p. 77). As noted in the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, the impact of an individual’s faith upon life-decisions is difficult to discern. Does one engage in certain activities and carry certain convictions because of one’s faith? Does one express faith because it confirms one’s activities and convictions? Is there some additional variable that impacts both of these? However, Haluza-Delay’s observation that congregational involvement creates opportunities for increased pro-environmental motivation does not require us to identify the order of these factors. His observation is simply that involvement in a Christian community creates opportunities to “potentially increase” pro-environmental motivation. To elicit information relevant to commitment opportunities, study participants were asked if they thought their constituents were more motivated on account of their faith than they would be otherwise. It should be noted that the empirical focus of the question here was on the participants’ assumptions or experience not, in actual fact, the logical ordering of constituents’ motivation.

## **Denominations**

Participants in the denominational component of the sample offered a series of responses relevant to commitment and motivation (see Table 4.13). One respondent, speaking of a denomination with a high degree of ethnic homogeneity, observed that faith did appear to provide motivation for the life choices of constituents. This motivation flowed through a highly integrated set of common values, political goals, and shared theological language. Another respondent shared the view that growth in ecological concern was part of a spiritual conversion connected to growth in love for one's neighbours. He said,

I think what we're needing is conversion. . . . That's the whole notion of integral ecology, trying to bring [an] understanding where everything is related, our prayers, our sense of the Divine. All is related to how we live and how we care for creation and how we pray spiritually. . . . How can we deal with the poor? How can we deal with the pains and cries of the earth? [This] ties into spirituality. Because I love God, I love my neighbour.

Another participant was unsure whether constituents would engage in pro-environmental initiatives if not for their faith. However, he believed that the "language of the sacred" changed how constituents viewed the task of creation care. Another interviewee stated that faith probably did provide motivation relevant to environmental initiatives, but also observed that political allegiance did as well.

## **Humanitarian Agencies**

Participants in this segment of the sample were generally clearer in their belief that faith provided motivation for the support their agencies received from constituents. Respondents referenced the importance of providing constituents with a theological or biblical rationale for projects.

**Table 4.13**

## Summary of Motivational Opportunities - Denominations

Part. ID Affiliation - Polity	Motivational Opportunities
1A CCC - P	Faith did motivate constituents, but in very diverse ways
1B CCC/EFC – P	Connection between faith and way of life emphasized in church and related educational institutions (i.e., stewardship)
1C CCC – E	Creation care is increasingly seen as an aspect of conversion, love for neighbour and support for life are key convictions
1D EFC - C	Constituents expected ethical advocacy to be link to biblical principles and are open to related arguments
1E CCC - E	Unclear (interviewee provided anecdotes but the question was asked too vaguely)
1F CCC - E	Language of sacred changes environmental discourse among constituents, faith creates hope and patience
1G EFC - C	Faith impacts approach to environmental issues but so do political pre-commitments
1H CCC - E	Living out faith, call to love the world and be good citizens, is nurtured by baptism and Holy Communion

Note. E = episcopal; C = congregational; P = presbyterian; CCC = Canadian Council of Churches; EFC = Evangelical Fellowship of Canada

This rationale varied from one agency to the next (see Table 4.14). Where one agency might offer a rationale anchored in the accounts of creation in Genesis, another would refer to the “great commandment” (Matt. 22:36-40) or the “great commission” (Matt. 28: 16-20). One interviewee described the importance of using the language of “biblical justice” over “social justice” in his denominational context. This vocabulary choice allowed potential donors to associate humanitarian projects with their high view of biblical authority and distinct from what they viewed as dominant political pressures.

One agency received much of its support from a heterogenous group with no connection to its constituent denomination. The interviewee from this agency was, therefore, unable to assess the motivational impact of faith upon financial supporters, but assumed that it varied widely. This interviewee did suggest, however, that it was a foundational faith commitment that motivated the

**Table 4.14**

## Summary of Motivational Opportunities - Humanitarian Agencies

Part. ID Affiliation - Polity	Motivational Opportunities
2A CFGB - C	Faith is seen as core to identity of agency and motivation of constituents to donate funds
2B CFGB - P	Faith is seen as core to identity of agency and motivation of constituents to donate funds
2C CFGB - E	Faith is seen as core to identity of agency, motivation of constituents to donate funds, and agency's goal of encouraging ecological conversion
2D CFGB - E	Agency provides resources to help constituents think about social issues through theological lens, ecological advocacy of regional church leaders is key
2E CFGB - E	Faith is part of agency's public identity, but donor base extends to general public
2F CFGB - C	Agency is increasingly purposeful about linking faith to programs and channeling evangelical impulse into social action
2G CFGB - C	Faith is seen as core to identity of agency and motivation of constituents to donate funds
2H CFGB - C	Agency encourages constituents to see connections between Bible and justice issues

Note. E = episcopal; C = congregational; P = presbyterian; CFGB = Canadian Foodgrains Bank

agency to assist those in need without discrimination and without implying any obligation on the part of recipients to participate in religious services.

Despite the strong belief that faith commitment motivated supporters, most of the agencies made a clear distinction between their humanitarian work and the religious work of affiliated denominations or global partners. This distinction meant that these agency representatives were hesitant to assess the impact of faith upon the work of their global partners. Most of these Canadian agencies made decisions about supporting projects based on their own strategic objectives, the local needs identified by partner agencies, and available capacity.

### Public-Theological Opportunities

The final set of opportunities are identified as being related to a religious organization's public theology. Haluza-Delay (2008) described these public-theological opportunities as "those factors that can constructively engage the public discourse within a pluralist society" (p. 77). More pointedly, Haluza-

Delay said that the basic Christian message, “has a public critique of greed, self-centeredness, materialism and the hubris of an overemphasis on human rationalism and exuberant humanism that may also worsen environmental problems” (p. 77). Christian communities and their leaders do not uniformly exercise this critical capacity. Nevertheless, the relevant question is whether the sample denominations and humanitarian agencies corroborated Haluza-Delay’s observation about public-theological opportunities. To elicit relevant information study participants were asked to describe the political advocacy of their organizations.

### **Denominations**

Five of the eight participants in the denominational segment of the study sample reported that their denomination engaged in public political advocacy (see Table 4.15). One denominational leader referenced an official doctrinal statement that placed political advocacy within the mandate of its leaders. She paraphrased it this way: “It is the church’s responsibility to speak publicly on social issues, as it is called to do by the will of God, and in doing so, to seek justice.” Though this statement had been developed in the middle of the last century, it still motivated public engagement. Another interviewee described a national committee tasked with providing leadership in the area of political advocacy. Most denominations had national-level staff that undertook advocacy work or encouraged congregations in the same.

Some denominations also engaged in advocacy through alliances with other faith-based organizations. Organizations mentioned in this context included Kairos, the Canadian Council of Churches and a current ecumenical campaign called “For the Love of Creation.” Of the denominations who did not directly or consistently engage in advocacy, two interviewees indicated that their constituent congregations looked to the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada for leadership on political advocacy.

**Table 4.15**

## Summary of Public-Theological Opportunities - Denominations

Part. ID Affiliation - Polity	Public-Theological Opportunities
1A CCC - P	Engage in public advocacy and participate in advocacy coalitions, official church doctrine calls for political engagement
1B CCC/EFC – P	Denominational committee exists to support public advocacy
1C CCC – E	The denomination engages in public advocacy, role of church leaders includes public advocacy
1D EFC - C	Public advocacy is limited, constituents defer to evangelical coalitions
1E CCC - E	Public advocacy is limited, occasionally regional leaders speak on political issues
1F CCC - E	Public advocacy has been a longstanding aspect of the role of church leaders, participate in various coalitions
1G EFC - C	Public advocacy is limited, constituents defer to evangelical coalitions
1H CCC - E	Public advocacy is part of the role of church leaders at all levels

Note. E = episcopal; C = congregational; P = presbyterian; CCC = Canadian Council of Churches; EFC = Evangelical Fellowship of Canada

A third mentioned that members of the church’s hierarchy occasionally, but rarely, issued statements on matters of public policy. The rarity of such statements in the Canadian context was notable because an international church leader within the denomination has garnered world-wide attention for supporting environmental initiatives.

### Humanitarian Agencies

Half of the humanitarian agencies were reported to have consistently engaged in political advocacy (see Table 4.16). One agency had a multi-staff office in Ottawa. Another had a national staff member who organized letter-writing campaigns and other forms of advocacy. Several of these interviewees reported that their colleagues were occasionally invited to meet with government officials. Within those agencies that did not engage in much public advocacy, two described contributing indirectly to advocacy through Canadian Foodgrains Bank. One interviewee described how members of her office were impressed by the courage of pastors in partner congregations in the global South who

**Table 4.16**

## Summary of Public-Theological Opportunities - Humanitarian Agencies

Part. ID Affiliation - Polity	Public-Theological Opportunities
2A CFGB - C	Agency engages in political advocacy and has office dedicated to this work
2B CFGB - P	Agency coordinates letter-writing campaigns, participates in advocacy coalitions, and is occasionally invited to brief government officials
2C CFGB - E	Agency engages in political advocacy
2D CFGB - E	Political advocacy is longstanding part of the agency's work, also participate in advocacy coalitions, and staff are occasionally invited to brief government officials
2E CFGB - E	See public fundraising campaigns as a form of advocacy for the economically vulnerable
2F CFGB - C	International affiliates engage in extensive political advocacy, but the Canadian agency does not
2G CFGB - C	Limited involvement in political advocacy (e.g., missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, vaccine equity)
2H CFGB - C	Very little, only through advocacy coalition

Note. E = episcopal; C = congregational; P = presbyterian; CFGB = Canadian Foodgrains Bank

publicly encouraged their congregants to abide by government guidelines related to the global pandemic. In their context, being outspoken on this issue was risky and put them at odds with a significant segment of the local population. Here, again, links to churches in the global South served to encourage change in Canadian Christian communities.

As noted above, several agencies described how they needed to avoid speaking directly about climate change. Not only was climate change a controversial concept among western constituents, but climate change represented a problem that constituents could not address through a financial donation. One interviewee stated,

The majority of [our constituents], who reflect the majority of Canadians, want to hear about development stories that make them feel good. You know, "Your dollar did improve the life of this farmer." It's harder for them to hear, "Your lifestyle is making the life of that farmer a whole hell of a lot harder."

In this case public advocacy exposed a double standard on the part of the agency's constituents.

### **Additional Obstacles and Opportunities**

Some of the obstacles and opportunities that the analysis uncovered were not directly related to those identified by Haluza-Delay (2008). In other cases, certain obstacles or opportunities were so specific and were reported frequently enough that they merited additional description. For clarity, I will cover both the obstacles and opportunities from the sample denominations (see Table 4.17) and then those from the humanitarian agencies (see Table 4.18).

#### **Denominations: Additional Obstacles**

One obstacle not mentioned by Haluza-Delay (2008) is the overall decline of Canadian, Christian denominations. One study participant noted that many churches in the denomination she represented struggled to keep the doors of their churches open and had little energy or resources left for new initiatives. Another noted that church members, especially young families, were increasingly busy and had little time for engagement beyond a weekly worship service. She put it this way:

The bulk of our audience is 60+, and that's kind of strange to me because that's not the demographic of our churches. There are a lot of churches that are aging and aging out, but [our denomination] is not like that. There are lots of young, thriving families. They're just not attending anything. They're too busy.

This interviewee's reference to churches "aging out" referred to those denominations who were losing capacity because only the elderly remained. Her point was that even in a denomination with a relatively young constituency, there is less time and energy allocated to church-based activities. She was not alone. Whether related to overall capacity or simply attention and time, several denominational representatives noted a decline in engagement and resources.

An additional obstacle was the impact of the sharp political divide in Canada, which showed up as "western alienation" within denominations. This was mentioned earlier under in the Critical Obstacles section. However, I identify it here because of the specificity and significance of the way this obstacle

was described by study participants. The impact of this obstacle is such that it is worth considering directly. This obstacle was exacerbated in ecclesial circles by the fact that many denominational offices were located in Ontario. Several participants also reported that environmental initiatives were often identified as part of a “liberal agenda” by skeptical constituents and thereby dismissed. Even if other constituents are not so dismissive, the politicization of environmental issues sometimes deterred denominational officials from advocating for environmental initiatives. Some denominational leaders were reluctant to be linked to organizations who, despite doing valuable environmental work, would tie the denomination to partners doing work that was even more (negatively) identified by dubious constituents. Finally, several participants noted the negative spillover of American political divisions into the Canadian ecclesial scene. One study participant noted the effect on sermons:

I’m just completely buffaloes by hearing too many sermons from Canadian ministers about American political agenda. I’m thinking, why are you wasting your time on that? Why don’t you do something different for goodness sake? I don’t want to hear about Trump and all that silly stuff . . . but that’s really where a lot of people are.

This observation was especially true for denominations with strong ties to sibling denominations across the border, though it was not limited to those.

### **Denominations: Additional Opportunities**

Additional opportunities seen in the data from the denominations segment of the study sample come in two main forms. First, as was noted in the previous section on paradigmatic obstacles, all but one of the denominational representatives referred to beliefs and values that encourage engagement in various mission or services initiatives, including environmental initiatives. Though the sort of paradigmatic obstacles Haluza-Delay (2008) described (e.g., pietism, ecological theology as heresy) still

**Table 4.17**

## Summary of Additional Obstacles and Opportunities - Denominations

<b>Part. ID Affiliation - Polity</b>	<b>Additional Obstacles</b>	<b>Additional Opportunities (not including positive paradigmatic factors listed in Table 8)</b>
1A CCC - P	Overall church decline, many issues to engage, risk of disconnection from constituency	Increased awareness of indigenous approaches to environment, resolutions passed by national assembly provide platform engaging fraught topics
1B CCC/EFC – P	Politicization of environmental issues, environmental initiatives identified with liberal/progressive agenda, lack of capacity/expertise, constituents depend on resource extraction economy, overall church decline, young families are busy	Increased awareness of indigenous approaches to environment, some congregations have sufficient funds to support notable environmental initiatives
1C CCC – E	Being linked to organizations/coalitions that violate church teaching, populist rejection of environmental issues, climate change triggers strong negative reaction from some constituents	International church statements on the environment provide useful platform, regional offices create pro-environment curriculum, increasing reference to precautionary principle
1D EFC - C	Constituents and related charities dependent on resource extraction economy, climate change triggers strong negative reaction from some constituents	Mission programs create educational opportunities (e.g., sharing stories of subsistence farmers affected by climate change)
1E CCC - E	Dependent on clergy initiative	Open to influence of international church leaders and Christian environmental organizations
1F CCC - E	Having national offices in ON alienates western constituents, western regional leaders are hesitant, reluctance to give up privilege or make lifestyle changes, worry that public engagement or policy matters will create divisions	Increased role of indigenous leadership, hearing from those impacted by climate change through ecclesial links (e.g., Pacific Islanders)
1G EFC - C	Insufficient cooperation between congregations, decline in influential leaders, pastors preoccupied with U.S. political issues	Open to influence of evangelical coalitions
1H CCC - E	Tendency to cast blame at others, too concerned about church infrastructure, national staff work requires extensive travel, political polarization, church is slow to adapt	Financial investments of denomination (e.g., retirement funds and endowments) discourage short term profit-seeking

Note. E = episcopal; C = congregational; P = presbyterian; CCC = Canadian Council of Churches; EFC = Evangelical Fellowship of Canada

exist, denominational representatives were more inclined to see beliefs as inclusive of ecological concerns than exclusive.

A second additional opportunity observed in the denominational segment of the sample was an openness to hearing from newer voices. Several denominational representatives reported that an increased interest in the beliefs and practices of indigenous communities provided an opportunity for a new perspective on environmental matters. This interest was manifest in both an increased attention paid to indigenous leaders from within a denomination and a more general interest in indigenous

traditions and practices. In a similar vein, denominational links to Christian communities in the global South proved especially effective in providing avenues for Canadian Christians to hear about the challenges faced by individuals and communities affected by climate change. It is notable that both of these additional opportunities were generally facilitated by a denomination's formal structure.

### **Humanitarian Agencies: Additional Obstacles**

Several additional obstacles appeared in the data from the humanitarian agencies included in the sample. As with the previous group, study participants representing humanitarian agencies also mentioned the challenges presented by political polarization and the resentment of some constituents to any climate change discourse. A related obstacle stems from the connection these agencies have with Canadian Foodgrains Banks. Canadian Foodgrains Bank was believed to be supported primarily by individuals involved in large, fossil-fuel-dependent agrobusinesses. In several cases participants identified this type of industrial agriculture as antithetical to the agroecology they supported in international contexts. A third obstacle noted by several participants in this sample was the desire of constituents for quick fixes and manageable issues. Elements of the ecological crisis, e.g., climate change, require deeper, more disruptive solutions. The immensity of the problem was overwhelming for some potential supporters and short-circuited their desire to make a concrete change in someone's life through a financial donation.

### **Humanitarian Agencies: Additional Opportunities**

While several study participants noted challenges that came with their support for Canadian Foodgrains Bank, one interviewee saw an opportunity. He saw that organization as an example of how Christian organizations might move past the political polarization that dominates so much of public life in Canada. He said,

I think CFGB has proven that [the political divide can be bridged], with a farming constituency and strong support from farmers predominantly, who are conservatives themselves and in many cases in predominantly conservative ridings. I think CFGB has been really successful because it does bridge that political divide. The urban-rural divide not so much, but certainly they've been successful because of that bridging.

**Table 4.18**

Summary of Additional Obstacles and Opportunities - Humanitarian Agencies

Part. ID Polity	Additional Obstacles	Additional Opportunities
2A CFGB - C	Constituent response to the concept of climate change, impact of political polarization (e.g., identification of environmental concerns with "liberal agenda"), constituents worry that environmental concerns imply pantheism	Wide base of constituents creates opportunity for educational work
2B CFGB - P	Urban constituents unable to relate to challenges of subsistence farmers in developing world	Sharing stories of impact of climate change on persons from the global South is key educational opportunity
2C CFGB - E	Partners who do other work that does not align with church teaching, connection of Canadian Foodgrains Bank with industrial agriculture, opposition of some regional church leaders to environmental concerns	Constituents are open to influence of global faith leaders, increasing profile of churches in global South raises awareness of impact of environmental crisis (e.g., climate change)
2D CFGB - E	Regional divide in Canada (e.g., more direct dependence on fossil fuel extraction in west), constituent desire for quick fixes and inspiring stories, federal government's bias against faith-based organizations	Sharing stories of impact of climate change on persons from the global South is key educational opportunity for constituency, Canadian Foodgrains Bank is valuable link between Canadian industrial farmers and global South
2E CFGB - E	Unclear	Trust built with public over long-term creates opportunities for new programs
2F CFGB - C	Significant segment of constituency engaged in industrial agriculture and resentful of climate change discourse, donors depend on oil and gas revenue, political polarization (e.g., identification of environmental concerns with "liberal agenda")	Connections with conservative constituency create opportunities for education, constituency is open to influence of evangelical environmental leaders/organizations, constituent youth are pushing for environmental initiatives
2G CFGB - C	Some constituents resent climate change discourse, Canadian Foodgrains Bank's dependence on industrial agriculture, significant segment of constituency resentful of climate change discourse	Sharing stories of impact of climate change on persons from the global South is key educational opportunity for constituency, creating worship resources raises awareness of environmental issues and makes connection with constituent's faith
2H CFGB - C	Constituent focus on acute crises inhibits concern for underlying issues (e.g., environment), environmental issues are too overwhelming to engage	Can tell constituents that church leaders from global South do not separate faith from social realities

Note. E = episcopal; C = congregational; P = presbyterian; CFGB = Canadian Foodgrains Bank

As in the denominations included in the sample, a key opportunity not observed by Haluza-Delay (2008) was the connection these agencies were able to make between their Canadian constituents and persons from the global South. These links, often made through the sharing of stories, presented a valuable opportunity for education on a topic that many constituents would be reluctant to hear about through other venues. This opportunity was enhanced by the fact that many of those who support these agencies were involved in agriculture and, therefore, were predisposed to take seriously the struggles of farmers from other parts of the world. In partnering with agencies from the global South, Canadian, Christian humanitarian agencies were positioned to have old paradigms revised (e.g., the distinction between spiritual and social forms of mission) and to pass this change in perspective on to their Canadian constituents.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Prompted by the assumption that the world's religions are "at least in theory, well positioned to mobilize millions of people" toward positive environmental behaviors (Veldman et al., 2014), this thesis has sought to explore how Canadian, Christian denominations and Canadian, international humanitarian agencies position themselves on these matters. The question driving this study was: What are the obstacles and opportunities experienced by Canadian, Christian denominations and humanitarian agencies relative to their engagement in environmental initiatives? To address this question, I explored the explanatory power of the framework articulated by Haluza-Delay (2008). In this final chapter I will discuss the results presented in the previous chapter in the context of the Haluza-Delay obstacles/opportunities framework and the larger question that prompted this study. I will also address this study's limitations, offer suggestions for additional research, and describe practical implications.

#### **Study Results in the Context of the Haluza-Delay Obstacles/Opportunities Framework**

How broadly applicable are Haluza-Delay's (2008) findings? While my own study cannot determine the outer bounds of applicability, the population I studied extended well beyond that studied by Haluza-Delay. At a general level, my findings suggest that the obstacles and opportunities for engagement in environmental initiatives identified by Haluza-Delay do apply to this broader set of Canadian, Christian denominations and humanitarian agencies. That my study generally corroborated Haluza-Delay's observations more than a decade later with a much broader population suggests that these obstacles and opportunities are knit deeply into the core structure or beliefs of Canadian, Christian churches and their affiliate agencies.

As I will explain further, two important qualifications should be kept in mind with respect to this general corroboration. First, the categories Haluza-Delay (2008) used are so broad that many of the obstacles and opportunities encountered by faith-based communities related to a wide range of issues

could fit within them. Therefore, while the broad applicability of Haluza-Delay's framework can be confirmed, there are serious limitations to its explanatory power and usefulness. Second, the situation in Canada has changed since Haluza-Delay conducted his autoethnographic research. While the broad categories still apply, my research revealed different points of emphasis, both specific points of tension and specific avenues for enhanced engagement in environmental initiatives.

### **Paradigmatic Obstacles**

The findings from the study sample of denominations and humanitarian agencies largely corroborate the existence of paradigmatic obstacles to environmental engagement. Haluza-Delay (2008) observed that a "pietistic faith system" can "weaken engagement" on social issues, including those linked to the environment (p. 75). While this is true, it must also be mentioned that study participants indicated that paradigmatic matters also served to sustain engagement in environmental initiatives among their constituents. This is reflective of the findings of Moyer and Scharper (2019), who noted that the Christian scriptural/theological "strand" is the most common worldview shaping the Canadian faith-based environmental organizations in their study sample (p. 41). Though a qualitative study such as this one cannot readily tease out causal factors, the existence of denominations and humanitarian agencies in transition indicates that paradigms of belief and practice can be expanded when appeals are made to authoritative texts or testimonies. Though paradigmatic obstacles remain, these factors seem to be less significant in the Canadian context than Nche (2020a) observes in the wider literature. This difference may indicate that Canadian denominations and humanitarian agencies are, on the whole, less impacted by theologies that encourage beliefs in human domination, the near-term destruction of the earth, fatalistic views of providence, or an oppositional view of faith and science than in the parts of the world represented by Nche's study.

Haluza-Delay (2008) believed that "over the last two decades, this [paradigmatic] obstacle has lessened" (p. 74). My research comes more than a decade after Haluza-Delay's and observes the same

trend of the receding impact of this set of obstacles. Only two interviewees reported that constituents worried that involvement in environmental initiatives would lead to heretical beliefs. Though one interviewee reported that Christian denominations were more engaged in environmental issues in the 1980s, the vast majority indicated an increase in environmental initiatives within their respective denominations or agencies. This finding parallels Moyer's (2018) profile of faith-based environmental organizations in Canada, which found that these organizations first became involved in environmental activities in the 1970s. Though my data are not precise enough to provide a timeline for the engagement of denominations and humanitarian agencies in environmental activities, the generally increasing trend of engagement is consistent with Moyer's findings. The denominations and agencies undergoing a transformation in their view of Christian mission indicates that this trend now encompasses organizations whose theologies previously limited mission to church planting or pietistic faith practice. The beginnings of environmental activities in Canadian organizations, as identified by Moyer, like Citizens for Public Justice (1970's), Mennonite Central Committee (1970s), and Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace (1970s), presaged the currently burgeoning engagement by more conservative or evangelical denominations and humanitarian agencies.

As indicated in the previous chapter, the transformation in these organizations was reported to be linked to the influence of the Lausanne Movement, a network of evangelical mission organizations that meet periodically to explore issues related to global Christian mission. The First International Congress on World Evangelization was held in Lausanne, Switzerland in 1974 (Lausanne Movement, 2021). One of the key products of that initial conference was the creation of a covenant. Section Five of that covenant document is titled "Christian Social Responsibility." It begins this way:

We affirm that God is both the Creator and the Judge of all men. We therefore should share his concern for justice and reconciliation throughout human society and for the liberation of men and women from every kind of oppression. Because men and women are made in the image of

God, every person, regardless of race, religion, colour, culture, class, sex or age, has an intrinsic dignity because of which he or she should be respected and served, not exploited. Here too we express penitence both for our neglect and for having sometimes regarded evangelism and social concern as mutually exclusive (Lausanne Covenant, sect. 5).

The roots of “integral mission” in an evangelical Protestant context are evident in this affirmation. It is interesting to note that the original Lausanne Covenant was articulated in the same decade that several of the Canadian organizations profiled by Moyer (2018) began engaging in environmental initiatives. Several of the study participants representing denominations and agencies going through a transformation in line with this vision noted that the basic sentiment has been corroborated by church leaders from the global South. The Lausanne Movement notably identified “creation care” as a “gospel issue” at a 2012 consultation in St. Ann, Jamaica, and has convened conferences on the issue at various locations around the world (Lausanne Movement, 2021). Other denominations and denominational networks within Canada have made similar pronouncements (e.g., For the Love of Creation, 2021; United Church of Canada, 2021). While the impact of official statements and corporate covenants is difficult to discern, as Wilkinson (2010) observed in the United States, the transformation of some of the denominations and humanitarian agencies represented in this study indicates their potential. A more general conclusion is also evident: when it comes to engagement in environmental initiatives, theology matters. This importance of theology was seen in the theological reshaping required by organizations in transition as well as through the observation that paradigmatic factors both enabled and inhibited environmental engagement. As Vaidyanathan et al. (2018) have shown, it is not clear whether church teaching drives an expanded view of Christian mission or simply catches up to concerns absorbed from the culture at large. However, whether they are playing catch-up or initiating change, Christian organizations must negotiate this theological terrain to maintain constituent support.

## **Applicability Obstacles**

My findings from studying Canadian denominations and humanitarian agencies largely corroborate Haluza-Delay's (2008) observation that questions of priority and applicability are obstacles to engagement in environmental initiatives. In the case of humanitarian agencies, the challenge largely lies with constituents, not with agency staff. Since the degradation of ecosystems has a negative effect on human wellbeing, and organizations involved in development and disaster relief among the world's most vulnerable are privy to this connection, it is not surprising that the staff of these humanitarian agencies would be willing to prioritize environmental initiatives. Donors might be less convinced.

In his description of applicability obstacles, Haluza-Delay (2008) focused on the relative prioritization of environmental and justice issues and argued that the two should not be seen in competition. The denominational leaders I interviewed indicated that the relative priority of environmental and justice issues was not where the obstacle lay. Denominations that see the pursuit of justice as a part of their mission generally understand the connection to environmental matters. However, as Haluza-Delay observed, "Consistent with the pietistic form of the paradigmatic obstacle noted above, many people operate as if faith should be personal rather than public, or that it is individually rather than socially relevant" (p. 75). My own findings resonate with this statement. The chief applicability obstacle identified in Canadian denominations and humanitarian agencies was not between environmental and social issues, but between engagement in social matters generally (including environmental issues) and a pietistic view of faith. An important caveat to this observation is that few if any denominations or agencies I studied were engaged in practical environmental initiatives that did not have human wellbeing as the central goal. The emphasis on human wellbeing is an important difference between my study and others that have sought to explore obstacles and opportunities relevant to environmental projects where the benefit to humans may have been less direct (e.g., Moyer et al., 2011; Moyer & Brandenbarg, 2021; Mucungunzi et al., 2021). This difference

may be why some of these previous studies observed applicability obstacles (e.g., pietism and anthropocentrism) to be more critical. It seems likely that if denominations or humanitarian agencies were choosing between environmental initiatives that had little apparent relationship to human wellbeing and those that did, they would choose the latter. This finding reflects Vaidyanathan et al. (2018) who observed that “to garner more support from religious people, environmental issues should be reframed as people-issues” (p. 490).

### **Critical Obstacles**

My findings largely corroborated Haluza-Delay’s (2008) observation that a lack of critical analysis is a barrier to involvement in environmental initiatives. However, it should be noted that opponents of engagement in environmental initiatives could argue that proponents of such initiatives lack similar critical abilities. Indeed, one interviewee noted the fact that the national church office was located in an Ontario city was itself a roadblock to engaging the concerns of constituents in the western part of the country.

My research also revealed that one of the key antidotes to a lack of critical awareness is an opportunity to hear from a wider set of voices, including First Nations and persons from the global South. The humanitarian agencies were especially well-positioned to enhance the critical awareness of constituents by sharing stories from the global South and listening to their international partners. Such links enabled these agencies and their constituents to understand the impact of Canadian consumption on communities around the world more clearly. These links, made possible by global denominational connections or networks like the Lausanne Movement, also pushed some Canadian faith communities to consider the shortcomings of theologies that divorced faith from social concerns. The significance of these links reflects strengths observed in faith-based environmental organizations in other studies (e.g., Moyer et al., 2011; Moyer & Brandenburg, 2021; Mucunguzi et al., 2021). Those studies identified networking and collaboration as important avenues for effective environmental engagement by faith-

based groups. Canadian, Christian denominations and humanitarian agencies are part of established organizational networks. For the benefit of stronger environmental engagement, these links are a good thing.

### **Convictional Obstacles**

My findings from studying Canadian denominations and humanitarian agencies generally affirmed Haluza-Delay's (2008) observation that convictional obstacles hinder involvement in environmental initiatives. I also found no reason to disagree with Haluza-Delay's assertion that in this respect there is little difference between church contexts and others. Leaders in Canadian, Christian denominations and humanitarian agencies struggle to align their life practices with their environmental values. Many of their constituents do as well. This struggle can be particularly acute when it is difficult to know if or how one's actions can bring about positive change. A study by Mayer and Smith (2019), which analyzed data from two large surveys involving thousands of individuals from 48 countries, found that climate fatalism inhibited willingness to pay for climate friendly policies. In other words, when people saw climate change as unstoppable, they were less willing to do anything about it that might come at a cost to themselves. Thus, Mayer and Smith wrote, "Another promising avenue to foster climate change adaptation and mitigation is to engender a sense of agency among those who are concerned about climate change" (p. 520). We can then speculate that engagement in environmental initiatives at a denominational or agency level serves as an alternative to individual acts that are seen as inconsequential or as compensation for a lack of personal agency in environmental matters. Either way, organizations that can describe the significance of collective environmental initiatives stand to gain support from constituents.

Communities that prioritized being counter-cultural were not immune from convictional obstacles. Several interviewees, representing denominations and agencies with more socially conservative constituencies, suggested that, while being counter-cultural was a positive value in their

setting, this value was often enacted in opposition to environmental initiatives, which they perceived to be products of the dominant culture, and not in opposition to consumerism or the interests of the fossil fuel industry. Just as these denominations and humanitarian agencies were not immune to the convictional obstacles faced by Canadians at large, neither were they unaffected by negative reactions to what some constituents perceived as the environmental values of social actors they sought to resist.

### **Subcultural Opportunities**

My findings from studying Canadian denominations and humanitarian agencies generally fit with the observations of Haluza-Delay (2008) regarding the subcultural opportunities available to Canadian Christian congregations as perceived by national-level staff. However, the distance between individual congregants on the one hand and the leaders I interviewed on the other, means that my findings may do little to advance the theory that this set of opportunities exists within Canadian, Christian denominations and humanitarian agencies. Leaders from both segments of the sample mentioned the challenge of staying in touch with the concerns and experiences of their constituents. Though denominational and agency leaders did report engaging in the activities of individual congregations, their involvement was largely episodic. Therefore, although the interviewees could speak to the existence of some types of subcultural opportunities (e.g., shared liturgies, common meals, cooperative ventures, educational programs), their lack of involvement over time meant that these leaders were not well-positioned to speak to the efficacy of these opportunities.

The above qualifications notwithstanding, it is logical to conclude that congregations, along with their related denominations and humanitarian agencies, are comprised of social events and relationships that could be described as “subcultural.” Indeed, an “unanticipated component” of the “ethics-based environmentalism” studied by Smith & Pulver (2009) was the focus on community building (p. 156). Several of the religious environmental groups they studied viewed community building as a way to extend their mission and catalyze change among a wider population. As sound as that

strategy may be, on its own the identification of subcultural “opportunities” within Christian communities says little. The social density of religious communities clearly creates potential for change, but whether or not these social features encourage engagement in environmental initiatives, as was observed in a Kenyan context by Moyer et al. (2015), or discourage such engagement is the issue of significance. Given the literature referenced in Chapter 2, which disputes the “greening-of-Christianity thesis” (e.g., Konisky, 2018; Taylor et al., 2016), it seems unlikely that the subcultural features of Canadian, Christian denominations and humanitarian agencies inherently create more opportunities than obstacles. Even so, there is little doubt that subcultural facets of Christian denominations and their related humanitarian agencies do exist and could be used to promote engagement in environmental initiatives. The literature on environmental learning in faith-based context may be particularly helpful here (e.g., Moyer et al., 2013; Backer, 2019).

### **Motivational Opportunities**

My findings generally corroborated the motivational opportunities identified by Haluza-Delay (2008). They also echoed other studies that highlighted the ability of religious communities to shape the values, foster hope, and make connections between spiritual and environmental matters (e.g., Moyer et al. 2011; Smith & Pulver, 2009), thereby encouraging engagement in environmental initiatives. Canadian, Christian denominations and humanitarian agencies depend on these motivational forces to garner support for a variety of projects. However, as noted in relationship to paradigmatic obstacles, the possibility also exists that congregational life could inhibit motivation for engagement in environmental initiatives. Such inhibition could come through certain eschatological beliefs or pietistic faith practice. This finding is similar that of Nche’s (2020a) meta-analysis, which identified “dominion belief,” “eschatological/end-time belief,” and “theological fatalism” as barriers to Christian involvement in mitigation of climate change (pp. 7-9). Though current research (e.g., Vaidyanathan et al., 2018) casts doubt on the direct causative relationship between declarative beliefs and environmental performance,

such beliefs could still provide *post hoc* justification for poor environmental performance. It is possible too that the motivational opportunities available to Canadian, Christian denominations and humanitarian agencies take the form of less declarative social dynamics such as modeling and habit formation. To the extent that leaders of these organizations are respected and known by their constituents, they have the opportunity to establish behavioural norms.

Haluza-Delay (2008) identified motivational opportunities as those that “potentially increase” commitment to environmental initiatives. It is hard to disprove potential. Nevertheless, interviewees from humanitarian agencies, perhaps because of their need to appeal directly to individual donors, had a clear sense of the importance of providing a theological rationale for action. It stands to reason that if such motivational opportunities exist with respect to humanitarian work generally, they would also apply to environmental initiatives. Whether this theological rationale functions to motivate constituents directly or by giving them a sense of spiritual license to invest in issues of concern to the broader culture remains difficult to discern.

### **Public-Theological Opportunities**

My findings resonate with the public-theological opportunities identified by Haluza-Delay (2008). Though not all the denominations had in-house staff dedicated to public advocacy, all but one indicated that this advocacy was part of their denominations’ public presence. The engagement of most of the humanitarian agencies in public advocacy, is strong evidence in support of Haluza-Delay’s observation that church-related organizations have an opportunity to do similar work on environmental matters. Indeed, as Van Dyke (2005) noted more than fifteen years ago, political advocacy on environmental matters is hardly a new activity for Christian organizations in the United States, even for some with mostly evangelical constituents. Moyer and Brandenburg (2021) described the multi-faceted character of faith-based environmental advocacy in Canada (e.g., participation in U.N. climate meetings, divestment from high polluting companies, policy research, and the development of election resources).

They also describe how these campaigns are often developed by faith-based organizations (e.g., ecumenical advocacy agencies), who then look to faith communities (e.g., denominations and individual congregations) to publicize them. My own research found that, due to the politically polarized landscape in which Canadian denominations now operate, this work is fraught with risk. Advocacy for environmental causes can be construed by constituents as blanket support for a “liberal” political agenda. Several respondents noted that engaging in environmental initiatives also provided fodder for constituents worried that the organization was sliding down a slippery slope into theological liberalism. This view is similar to Wilkinson’s (2010) observation about the significance of political pre-commitments among her study population. In this light it is not surprising that the organizations I studied, especially the humanitarian agencies, were extremely careful with the language they use around politically consequential topics. Some, as I noted earlier, spoke of “adapting to a changing climate” instead of “adapting to climate change” as a way of sidestepping politically fraught debates about the consequences of human industrial activity. Nevertheless, their commitment to advancing human welfare positively disposes them to taking environmental issues seriously. The experience these agencies have in mobilizing constituents on other matters of policy by combining theological motivation and policy analysis suggests that an opportunity exists for them to be more involved in environmental initiatives.

### **Broader Considerations**

As stated before, my research findings generally corroborate the Haluza-Delay (2008) obstacles/opportunities framework and broaden its applicability to Canadian, Christian denominations and humanitarian agencies. According to study participants, the obstacles Haluza-Delay identified do inhibit these faith-based organizations from engaging in environmental initiatives. The opportunities Haluza-Delay identified are applicable to this population as well. My research also revealed several specific obstacles and opportunities, which are not addressed directly by the Haluza-Delay

obstacles/opportunities framework. Political polarization and declining resources are two such obstacles to engagement in environmental initiatives. Though two studies that have been published since my study began, Nche's meta-analysis (2020a) and the updated description of Canadian, faith-based environmentalism by Moyer and Brandenburg (2021), have also observed that a lack of funds and related resources are widely observed institutional barriers to Christian organizations engaging in efforts to mitigate climate change, neither of these studies say much about the impact of political polarization. Here my study offers an important emendation to both Haluza-Delay's framework and the larger literature represented by Nche's paper.

Interest in indigenous perspectives and an openness to hearing the experiences of those from the global South are two additional opportunities. Though these two linked opportunities could be identified as falling under the subcultural heading in Haluza-Delay's (2008) work, the specific identification of these potential pathways is important. The wide availability of new communication technologies makes these opportunities more viable now than they may have been in the past. In addition, the observation that several denominations and humanitarian agencies are going through a theological transition, moving from a pietistic perspective to one that values the integration of social and spiritual concerns, is significant. This opportunity can be identified as falling under Haluza-Delay's paradigmatic or motivational headings, but here too, the identification of the specific pathway is significant. Canadian, Christian denominations and humanitarian agencies that place a high value on Christian mission and biblical faith can be refashioned to engage a broader set of concerns linked to human wellbeing, a set of concerns that include the ecosystems upon which people depend. While stating matters in this way would likely sound overly mechanical or manipulative to constituents of these organizations, ample theological language exists to describe changes in direction that cohere with a biblical worldview and assumptions about divine intervention (e.g., repentance, new wineskins, guidance of the Holy Spirit, biblical authority).

One of the broad factors that Haluza-Delay's (2008) paper does not address, and therefore was not addressed by my research, is the potential impact of the social location or demographic characteristics of decision makers. It is possible that if the decision makers in an organization experience a type of social privilege that insulates them from the ecological crisis, they would be prone to turn their backs on participation in environmental matters. Since many of these organizations are ultimately accountable to a broad membership base, this potential obstacle may be less likely than it first appears. However, it cannot be ruled out. Furthermore, the prominence of factors like political polarization and links to the global South within the results of my study, suggest that social location does matter to these organizations. While these factors may point to the potential impact of social location on decisions about engagement in environmental initiatives, without any attending demographic data, the link cannot be anything more than a hypothesis.

What would it take for more Canadian, Christian denominations and related humanitarian agencies to regularly engage in environmental initiatives? The Haluza-Delay (2008) obstacles/opportunities framework provides part of the answer. There are paradigmatic, applicability, critical, and convictional inhibitions at work for many of these faith-based organizations. And others are making use of subcultural, commitment, and public-theological opportunities. Another obvious part of the answer is surely that some denominations and humanitarian agencies simply have mandates that point them away from involvement in environmental initiatives. Not every Canadian, Christian organization can address every issue. Furthermore, some study participants mentioned that a decline in resources inhibits engagement in environmental initiatives. A lack of resources could further pinch the mandate of these organizations. Yet part of the burden of this research project comes from the assumption that this type of explanation is not sufficient. To say that a Canadian, Christian organization simply chooses, even with reference to its mandate, to address other issues begs the question: Why not engage in environmental initiatives? This question turns us again to the paradigmatic, application,

critical and convictional obstacles observed by Haluza-Delay and the specific additions revealed by my study.

### **Limitations**

A qualitative study like this one cannot produce data that is necessarily generalizable across the entire population of Canadian denominations or Christian humanitarian organizations, certainly not the 2.3 billion people that identify as Christians around the globe. Beyond the general limitations inherent in qualitative studies such as this one, the structure of this particular study implied several limits. Several of these limitations have been mentioned already. First, the fact that this study focused on denominations and humanitarian agencies meant that some individuals, informal Christian networks, and non-denominational churches were not represented. It should be noted, however, the constituencies of the Canadian, Christian humanitarian agencies that were included in the study did spread beyond denominations. Several agency representatives described ways in which their organization was intentionally trying to broaden its constituent base beyond that of its founding denomination(s). Second, the fact that I did not study Canadian, Christian organizations whose work focused on environmental issues may have also affected the findings. It is possible that these types of organizations benefit from aspects of the Christian faith that denominations and humanitarian agencies are unable to access. Third, it is also possible that the link to Canadian Foodgrains Bank shared by all the humanitarian agencies colours the results. Several study participants did mention that it was specifically some of their constituents economically dependent on industrial agriculture that inhibited their agency's involvement in environmental initiatives. Fourth, the findings generated by this study are dependent on the reliability of the study participants. Their responses, offered within the context of a formal study such as this, might have differed from the official communication presented on organizational websites, formal reports, or public presentations given by staff. In some cases this distinction was noted by interview participants. In other cases the differences are more difficult to discern. Comparing the

responses offered by study participants with more “official” communication was beyond the scope of this study.

### **Further Research**

The blossoming of research at the intersection of religion and the environment demonstrates the ongoing interest and importance of studies in this field. There continues to be a need to study the impact of religions other than Christianity (Moyer & Scharper, 2019). The existing and potential contribution of indigenous traditional knowledge toward environmental sustainability in this country is a related and particularly prescient topic. Several of the issues raised by my study would also be worthy of further examination. First, several study participants spoke of a process they described as an ecological conversion, though not always in those terms. Though there are many references to this concept in the scholarly literatures (e.g., Hanchin & Hearlson, 2020; Howell, 2021), it would be interesting to study what these conversions, at an individual or corporate level, have in common. Second, the tension experienced by humanitarian agencies connected to Canadian Foodgrains Bank is also worthy of study. How do these agencies navigate the gulf between the agricultural practices used by many of their supporters and those they advocate in the global South? Third, it would be interesting to see if engagement in environmental initiatives could be linked to the revitalization of individual congregations or whole denominations. Perhaps engaging one of the most pressing issues of our time is itself an opportunity for demonstrating the continued relevance of Christian communities in twenty-first-century Canada.

### **Practical Implications**

This study has added to our understanding of the obstacles and opportunities faced by Canadian denominations and humanitarian agencies relative to their engagement in environmental initiatives. Beyond the implications for the growing body of research on religion and environment, several practical applications of this study are also evident. First, while the situation of each Canadian denomination and

humanitarian agency is unique, many of the challenges they experience are shared by others. There are a variety of reasons for this situation, but the result is that organizational leaders would do well to consult with each other. Though constituencies differ, many of the Canadian, Christian organizations have similar subgroups within their base of supporters. Consultation between organizations would allow leaders to identify strategies that might enable them to further address environmental issues. For instance, some organizations have found theological language that has helped motivate their more conservative constituents, while others have not.

A second practical implication is that, in an era of reduced capacity in many of these organizations, constituents who are interested in seeing increased commitment to environmental initiatives would be wise to make use of the official decision-making apparatus available to them. Decisions made at national assemblies and the like are important in helping staff decide how to dedicate the resources they do have. These decisions have implications for how the staff of these denominations and humanitarian agencies make use of the subcultural and public-theological opportunities present across these organizations. A related implication is that denominational staff and congregational staff should not take the continued existence of their faith communities for granted. If ongoing mission and service initiatives, including environmental ones, are to remain viable, healthy congregations are required.

Finally, the global links possessed by many Canadian, Christian denominations and humanitarian agencies are a valuable resource. While the significance of these links is not news to church officials who value them for ecclesial reasons, the potential impact of these connections in politically polarized settings has yet to be fully appreciated. The oppositional nature of Canadian politics has been identified as a threat to the work of the agencies studied here, and especially to the potential for growing engagement in environmental initiatives. However, trusted voices and stories that come from perspectives not previously attended to have proven useful in resetting these conversations. Before

allowing the common divides in Canadian culture to set agendas for denominations or humanitarian agencies, leaders of these organizations would do well to listen to other voices, especially those from the global South and indigenous Canadians. Listening to these voices is not a panacea, but it has already proven effective in several organizations.

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## APPENDIX A

Dear Potential Study Participants,

My name is Anthony Siegrist. I am a graduate student in Environmental Sustainability at the University of Ottawa. I am currently conducting research on the challenges and opportunities faced by Christian organizations in the area of environmental or creation care programming. I am writing to invite you to participate in this research. I would like to interview you to learn more about your organization's decision-making with respect to involvement in these kinds of initiatives.

**Title of Study:** Environmental Programs and Projects in Christian Organizations: Obstacles and Opportunities

**Principal Researcher:** Dr. Anthony Siegrist  
Masters of Environmental Sustainability Student  
University of Ottawa, Ottawa, ON

**Research Supervisor:** Dr. Paul Heintzman  
Affiliated Professor, Institute of the Environment  
University of Ottawa, Ottawa, ON

Contact: XXX

Contact: XXX

**Participation:** Interviews will be conducted in English and over Zoom at a time that is convenient for you. Each interview will take roughly one hour and will involve a series of open-ended questions. These questions can be provided to you in advance, but there is no need to prepare. You will be able to choose not to respond to any of the questions. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed for analysis, but your answers will not be associated with your name or organization. After the interview you will be sent a copy of the transcription, which you can check for accuracy. Please confirm your willingness to participate in this study by contacting me by email at XXX or by phone at XXX.

**Purpose of the Study:** The goal of this research is to develop a better understanding of the obstacles and opportunities faced by Christian organizations with respect to environmental initiatives. This study specifically looks at humanitarian/relief organizations and denominational networks in Canada. Having a better understanding of how these organizations make decisions related to environmental programming will clarify the key factors in the development of programmatic portfolios. It will also add to our understanding of faith-based environmental work in Canada and the contribution of these organizations to the common good.

**Risks:** Though answering questions about the organization you work for could make you uncomfortable, there is little other anticipated risk from participation in this study. Your organization has been selected from a larger list of related organizations and neither you nor your organization will be identified in any publications derived from this research. The researcher will disassociate the data collected from your

name and the name of your organizations. Results will be published in aggregate format, though some quotations may be used anonymously for purposes of illustration.

**Confidentiality:** The information that you share will remain confidential and will be used solely for the purposes of this research. If your answers to open-ended questions are quoted in any presentation of research findings, it will be done anonymously and without including any identifying information.

**Voluntary Participation:** While your participation in this research study is highly valued, you are under no obligation to do so. Furthermore, you may refuse to answer any question that you do not want to answer or withdraw from the interview and larger study at any point.

**Information about the Study Results:** If you would like to receive an electronic copy of the research findings, please indicate your interest at the time of the interview.

If you have any questions about this study or about your participation, you may contact the researcher or his supervisor with the information included above. If you have any questions with regards to the ethical conduct of this study, you may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5; tel.: (613) 562-5387 or [ethics@uottawa.ca](mailto:ethics@uottawa.ca).

Please keep this letter for your records.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Anthony G. Siegrist  
Graduate Student - MSc Environmental Sustainability  
Institute of the Environment, University of Ottawa

## APPENDIX B

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### Consent Form

Please note that this form can be signed below or affirmed orally at the time of the interview.

**Title of Study:** Environmental Programs and Projects in Christian Organizations: Obstacles and Opportunities

**Principal Researcher:** Dr. Anthony Siegrist  
Masters of Environmental Sustainability Student  
 University of Ottawa, Ottawa, ON  
 Contact: XXX; XXX

**Research Supervisor:** Dr. Paul Heintzman  
 Affiliated Professor, Institute of the Environment  
 University of Ottawa, Ottawa, ON  
 Contact: XXX; XXX

**Invitation to Participate:** I am invited to participate in the abovementioned research study conducted by Dr. Anthony Siegrist (as part of his Master's Thesis) under the supervision of Dr. Paul Heintzman.

**Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of the study is to understand the factors involved in decisions Christian organizations make about their involvement in environmental initiatives.

**Participation:** My participation will consist of one interview over Zoom, which will be roughly one hour in length. During this interview I will be asked questions about the way my organization makes decisions about its programs and projects. The interview will be audio-recorded.

**Risks:** My participation in this study will not entail revealing personal information. I have received assurance from the researcher that diligent effort will be made to minimize any risks related to revealing information about my organization or my own views. If I wish to review a transcript of the interview, I will have the opportunity to do so. Transcripts will be sent by email, which I understand is not always secure, and I will have one week to provide corrections or to withdraw responses.

**Benefits:** My participation in this study will aid in the understanding of faith-based organizations and, specifically, how Christian organizations can make decisions about programs contributing to the public good.

**Confidentiality and Anonymity:** I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the contents will be used only for compilation of data related to the present study. My confidentiality will be protected by disassociating information I provide from my name and that of my employer. Research findings will be presented primarily in aggregate form and any quotations used will have all identifying information removed.

**Conservation of Data:** The data collected will be kept in a secure manner and accessed only by the principal researcher and supervisor. Following the completion of the study, interview transcripts will be securely kept by the principal researcher and research supervisor for a minimum of five years and then destroyed. Electronic copies of interview transcripts will be stored on a password protected and encrypted external drive. Hard copies will be stored in a locked cabinet.

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**Voluntary Participation:** I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions without suffering any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be destroyed.

**Acceptance:** I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Dr. Anthony Siegrist, graduate student in the Institute for the Environment, under the supervision of Dr. Paul Heintzman.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or his supervisor. If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5; Tel.: (613) 562-5387; Email: [ethics@uottawa.ca](mailto:ethics@uottawa.ca).

This consent form can be signed and dated below or affirmed orally at the time of the interview. I am welcome to print a copy of this form for my records.

Participant's signature: *(Signature)*

Date: *(Date)*

Researcher's signature: *(Signature)*

Date: *(Date)*

## APPENDIX C

**Interview Structure**

**Free and Informed Consent:** Participants will have the option of demonstrating free and informed consent prior to the interview by signing a consent form or by affirming their consent orally. If they choose to affirm their consent orally the principal researcher will read the content of the consent form at the start of the interview.

These in-depth interviews will explore the interviewee's knowledge of their organization's decision-making related to environmental programs and projects. The interviews will be conducted semi-formally. The precise wording of questions may vary (e.g., substituting the term 'denomination' for 'organization' as needed), but the following questions will be put to each individual in some form:

**General**

- 1) Can you tell me a bit about your organization?
  - a. How long has it existed?
  - b. How would you describe its constituency (including basic demographics)?
- 2) What sorts of mission or service projects or programs does your organization carry out?
  - a. Does it engage in any aspects of creation care or environmental stewardship?
- 3) How are projects or programs chosen?

**Obstacles**

- 1) Are there specific beliefs held by your organization that inhibit or encourage creation care?
  - a. How widely do you think these beliefs are shared by your constituency?
- 2) How would concern for creation rank in relationship to other forms of Christian mission (e.g. poverty, healthcare, food security, education, evangelism)?
  - a. Has this changed much over the past five, ten, or twenty years?
- 3) In what ways do you think your organization's choices in forms of mission or service are shaped by its social context?
  - a. Do you see a relationship between the support your organization receives for given projects and the 'popularity' of these issues in the wider culture?
- 4) Has your organization called its constituency to act in ways that counter cultural norms?
  - a. How successful was this?
- 5) Are you aware of other factors that inhibit your organization's engagement in environmental programs?

**Opportunities**

- 1) Would you say that your organization can leverage a distinctive subculture of its constituents to engage in mission/service programs?
  - a. Are there programs that connect closely with the history or traditional practices of constituents?
  - b. Do environmental projects fit into this distinctive subculture in any way?
- 2) Do you think faith/religion gives your organization a stronger sense of commitment (or responsibility) to programs than it would have otherwise?
  - a. Is this link between faith/religion and programs true of your constituency?
  - b. Does this link between faith/religion and programs relate to support for environmental projects?
- 3) Does your organization publicly engage in issues related to the common good (e.g., public policy, education, legal matters)?
  - a. Is this public engagement primarily critical or affirming?
  - b. Has your organization addressed environmental matters through public engagement?

**Transcript Review:** At the completion of the interview participants will be encouraged to review a transcript to correct factual errors or errors in transcription. Any grammatical corrections necessary will be made by the principal researcher. Participants will be made aware that transcripts will be sent to them in pdf form by email and reminded that the security of email communication cannot be guaranteed. Participants will have one week to review an interview transcript.