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## Chapter

# Laudato si', Six Years Later

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## Abstract

The Christian Churches' traditional environmental ethic is stewardship. *Laudato si'* (2015) has augmented stewardship ethics with an ethics of care. The ethics of care is also the one that inspires Francis of Assisi and Bonaventure, indigenous people and feminist ethics. *Laudato si'* puts a major emphasis on education and pays scant attention to policy because deep changes allegedly need to occur first at the individual level. Policy toward global ecological problems has been difficult to formulate and implement because the latter are public goods “wicked problems”. Some policy experts, in their respective reviews of U.S. climate policies, tend to fall back on ethics rather than policy as a major motivator for appropriate individual behavior, comforting pope Francis' conviction. The relatively recent ethics of relational values may be a useful tool to build bridges among different types of ethics. Could religion, any religion, be an alternative motivator for pro-environmental behavior? Abundant sociological analysis concludes to the contrary. Eco-theology is creation theology that has been shaped by environmental problems. Its summary provided here in point form offers the potential for becoming a mobilizing “grand-narrative”. However, it is still in its infancy and does not have a unified methodology yet.

**Keywords:** stewardship, ethics of care, virtue ethics, ethics of relational values, creation theology, eco-theology

## 1. Introduction

Shellenberger and Nordhaus argued many years ago that the environmental movement needs a grand narrative capable of motivating people and nations to take ecology seriously, i.e. capable of changing values, behaviors, and policies towards greater harmony between mankind and the balance of nature ([1], pp. 32–34). This message is translated by nearly all religions into treating creation with reverence and respect. The encyclical letter *Laudato si'* from Pope Francis which came out on May 24 2015 contributes to the required grand narrative not so much by changing the Christian worldview as by changing its ethical emphasis [2]. The relatively technocratic stewardship ethical perspective which goes back to the ancient Greek and Roman philosophers—that implicitly Shellenberger and Nordhaus reject—has been replaced or, at least, refined into the ethics of care. The association of these ethics, practiced by Francis of Assisi and formalized by his disciple Bonaventure, provides one side of the imaginary required by Shellenberger and Nordhaus, the ethical side, the stable side of the required discourse. The other side, less stable as it depends on our current theology, philosophy, and cosmology, is offered by eco-theology. There is

very little current eco-theology in *Laudato si'* but the latter opens the door extraordinarily wide to the former ([2, 3], par 145–153, par 199–205).

This chapter reviews the ethics of care and its ramifications as well as the more traditional virtue ethics, also present in the encyclical, and ties them together with the more recent ethics of relational values. While ethics and education are capable of changing values, policies are needed to change behaviors. While *Laudato si'* emphasizes the need for education, it does not devote much attention to policies except to remind us of the environmental toolbox and to critique some of these tools for their underlying utilitarian foundations ([3], pp. 172–175). Based largely on D. Jamieson's and N. Rich's respective critiques of climate policy in the U.S., I echo their conclusion that some current environmental problems are “wicked problems” and, therefore, not amenable to easy solutions ([4–6], Section 2). While the sociological literature on religion as a motivator for environmental behavior finds that religious motivation is weak at best ([6], Section 3), I propose to disseminate widely the current eco-theological story despite its limitations. The latter can nicely tie with the teachings of Paul and some fathers of the Church and thus with the traditional treasure chest of Christian Churches. Moreover, the eco-theological story is widely œcumenical ([3], pp. 60–77).

This chapter is based in part on a book on *Laudato si'* I wrote in French in 2019 [3] and on an unpublished paper in English posted on the Academia platform in the same year [6]. The last section of this chapter on eco-theology is new.

## **2. The ethics of *Laudato si'***

### **2.1 To protect the whole of creation is within the purview of the pope's function**

In his inaugural homily, Pope Francis made clear his personal commitment to ecology. The pope concluded: “...to protect the whole of creation, to protect each person, especially the poorest, to protect ourselves: this is a service that the Bishop of Rome is called to carry out, yet one to which all of us are called...” [7]. The spiritual leaders of the Orthodox Church have assumed the same responsibility for their Church at least since 1989 ([3], p. 69). The World Council of Churches, which regroups most Christian Churches including the Catholic one (membership limited to its Commission on Faith and Order), placed ecology as an integral part of the Churches' responsibility at its Vancouver meeting in 1983, i.e. 32 years before *Laudato si'* ([3], p. 60).

### **2.2 Stewardship ethics versus care ethics**

Cardinal Turkson, the ghostwriter behind *Laudato si'*, points out that “the word ‘stewardship’ only appears twice” [in the encyclical]. The word ‘care’ on the other hand, appears dozens of times. This is no accident, we are told. While stewardship speaks to a relationship based on duty, ‘when one cares for something it is something one does with passion and love’” ([8], July 2nd). Being a steward is a job. Caring is a state of being.

I do not intend to spend time in this paper on stewardship ethics except to note that there is a tradition going back to the Greek natural philosophers, Plato and Aristotle, which considered nature as an organism which, in turn, had an intrinsic good of divine origin. The role of mankind was to understand the intrinsic goodness of the non-human world and to improve its relationship with the former towards greater harmony [9]. This is also the Jewish tradition of *shalom* ([10], p. 19).

The improved harmony is obtained through husbanding (and not through entrepreneurship) because only non-human nature creates wealth. This is the origin of the primacy of agriculture in economic thought, which persisted to the Physiocrats and may be traced back to Xenophon [9]. In opposition to this classical influence which leads to stewardship, under Hebrew influence Christianity “gets the idea that nature is a kind of enemy which has to submit itself to human and divine will. Humanity is explicitly entrusted to rule over the earth as God rules over it” ([11], p. 18).

I will add though, as pointed out by Willis Jenkins in relation to Karl Barth’s creation theology, that stewardship in Christian theology means obedience to God and implies nothing about the value of non-human nature. The latter has no standing of its own and does not participate in the creative process. It is an outcome of creation ex nihilo according to Karl Barth as interpreted by Keller. Jenkins considers that this interpretation encourages the dominion of mankind. Humans are elected by the external covenant through which, according to Jenkins, they witness what God does with creation: “...God’s command entirely determines the meaning of creation, and summons as its witness a correspondence in humans” ([12], p. 12).

Care ethics is the ethics of indigenous people, the feminists, and of Francis of Assisi and his disciple Bonaventure. The commonalities of care ethics with the ethics of *Laudato si'*, virtue ethics, and with the ethics of relational values are striking (see *infra*). The Oxford Handbook of Environmental Ethics characterizes the ethics of care as follows:

*Ethics of care highlight the affective [my emphasis] dimensions of morality, the inevitability of dependence and interdependence, the importance of caretaking and healthy attachments in the basic fabric of human well-being, and the relational and contextual nature of any ethical question or problem.... They [care ethics' followers] therefore reject the idea that caring and caretaking are trivial or irrelevant in “public” spheres. ...they argue that women may therefore have significant epistemic insight concerning philosophical and practical understandings of care ethics ([13], p. 2).*

The care ethics followers underscore “the limitations of worldviews that deny reliance on nature”. They emphasize the importance of caring for other humans, for more effective caring of nature, and, more generally, the importance of relationships that frame a moral problem.

*Environmental ethics that incorporate paradigms of caring conceive of environmental harms and the exploitation of nonhuman animals as failures to extend caring to worthy others and see those failures in relation to similar failures to care for other people ([13], p. 3).*

*They [relationships] have intrinsic value [my emphasis] as sources of identity, community, and spirituality but also instrumental value as sources of sustenance and usable knowledge that furnish guidance on caring for biodiversity and ecosystems. The relationships are morally weighty because they motivate responsibilities involving reciprocity, harmony, solidarity, and collectivity. The term “caring” is used to suggest a value foundational for justice and sustainability ([13], p. 5).*

The ethics of caring is the ethics of indigenous people.

*We [indigenous people] must look at the life that water supports (plants/medicines, animals, people, birds, etc.) and the life that supports water (e.g., the earth, the rain, the fish). Water has a role and a responsibility to fulfill, just as people do. We do not have the right to interfere with water's duties to the rest of Creation. Indigenous knowledge tells us that water is the blood of Mother Earth and that water itself is considered a living entity with just as much right to live as we have ([13], p. 7, citing McGregor).*

*...from an Aboriginal perspective justice among beings of creation is life-affirming ([13], p. 8, citing McGregor).*

*The Kari-Oca 2 declaration calls on "civil society" to respect indigenous "values of reciprocity, harmony with nature, solidarity, and collectivity," including "caring and sharing." The declaration also claims that the idea of saving "nature by commodifying its life-giving and life-sustaining capacities [is] a continuation of the colonialism that Indigenous Peoples and our Mother Earth have faced and resisted for 520 years ..." ([13], pp. 7–8)*

*In the writings discussed here, we see "care" as referring to recognizing and learning from one's place in a web of diverse relationships and being drawn by the responsibilities that are embedded in such relationships. Indigenous movements emphasize the importance of specific relationships involving reciprocal, though not necessarily equal, responsibilities among participants who understand one another as relatives. Accepting responsibilities is constitutive of realizing healthy ecosystems that already include human communities ([13], p. 8).*

The interconnections between our relations with other people and our relations with non-human nature are clearly at the center of the Encyclical. The latter says:

*For them [indigenous people], land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values. When they remain on their land, they themselves care for it best ([2], para. 146).*

Note the connections between indigenous ethics and the nature rights movement [14]. The ethics of caring is also a feature of feminist ethics. The latter is characterized this way by the Oxford Handbook:

*In academic theory, a movement to claim care ethics as a distinct ethical approach was sparked by philosopher Sara Ruddick's articulation of 'maternal thinking' as an effective and pervasive form of moral reasoning focused on attentive caring for dependent others... ([13], p. 10).*

Another perspective focused on appropriate caretaking and meeting responsibilities within specific relationships.

*Early studies indicated that these different approaches to ethics are linked to gender roles within patriarchy ([13], p. 10).*

*Caring labor is often assigned to and associated with females and subjugated peoples, whose social identities may be defined by self-sacrifice and service for others and whose options may be severely limited to those associations ([13], p. 10).*



*Feminist care ethics include moral orientations that (1) understand individuals, including human selves and other beings, as essentially embedded and interdependent, rather than isolated and atomistic, even if they also exercise some degree of autonomy; (2) take mutually beneficial caring relationships to be foundational and paradigmatic for ethics; (3) highlight the common association of care work with females and subjugated peoples; (4) emphasize the virtues, skills, and knowledge required for beneficial caring relationships to flourish; (5) are attentive to the contexts of moral questions and problems; and (6) recommend appropriate caring and caretaking as remedies for addressing histories of harm and injustice, and as necessary counterpoints to the overemphasis in some cultures on impersonal, abstract ethical judgments ([13], p. 9).*

Feminism had assimilated the inferior status of women to the one of non-human nature. Feminist theology rejects the patriarchal image of an omnipotent God, which is common in many religions, the mind–body dualism at the origin of women’s inferior status, and the superiority of reason in favor of wisdom ([3], p. 76–77).

Of course, Francis of Assisi practiced care ethics with people, animals, and other elements of non-human nature to which he attached a familial connotation, a kinship. His spiritual vision was articulated by Bonaventure, “drawing on the ancient understanding of philosophy as love of wisdom” shared by Augustine among others including the Greek fathers of the Church. “Wisdom ought to take possession of the entire person, i.e. with respect to the intellect, the affective life, and the person’s action” ([15], p. 3).

For Bonaventure, “since God is relational and God is present in all reality, all reality is relational” ([15], p. 3). This is the foundation of the metaphysics of the good. In Bonaventure,

“...We find the intuition and spirit of Francis translated into formal philosophy and systematic theology” ([15], p. 3)... “Both share a radically Christocentric spirituality, a belief that God is revealed through creation, and an understanding that all creation is essentially good and relational in character” ([15], p. 3)... “In God, all life originates, finds expression in the time and space of the created order, and discovers its ultimate destiny in return to God. The Trinity is the template for this circular movement” ([15], p. 4).

Bonaventure understood creation to have an essential role in salvation history. Creation is the language of God to mankind. But the book of creation has been rendered opaque by mankind’s sin ([15], p. 7). Creation is a melody whose components are to be understood as well as the whole ([15], pp. 5–6). This points to the importance of the natural sciences in helping to understand the character of God.

In its fullest sense, salvation is the actualization of the deepest potential that lies at the heart of created reality by reason of the creative love of God. The theology of the return of creation to God is, in essence, the theology of history. Drawn from the Franciscan intellectual tradition that integrates effective inquiry and social engagement, knowledge alone is not adequate to guide the human to a balanced relationship with creation, nor to the sense of religious purpose God intends for all created reality. This is the deepest sense of what the Church understands to-day by “human ecology,” an ecology that includes mankind, and by eco-theology.

*[Saint] Francis launched a lay reform movement that emphasized devotion to the Incarnation, Eucharistic adoration, an inclusive, familial spirituality, and practical expressions of compassion within society ([15], p. 2; [16]).*

*Incarnation was not an afterthought, a remedial strategy. Rather, the Incarnation was conceived before the creation of the world as a means to unite humanity with God through love; it was not a discrete historical event, nor merely a precondition for the word to be preached to us; it was not necessitated by sin. Rather, the Incarnation is the highest expression of divine love ([16] citing Warner).*

*Because the Eucharist is incarnated in our lives and rooted in our soil, they [our lives and soil] bring the poor and their struggles and the rape of the earth to the center of the Eucharistic celebration ([16] citing Margaret Scott).*

*Adopting the kinship model demands a form of conversion. It involves a new way of seeing and acting. It involves extending the love of neighbor to embrace creatures of other species. It involves extending the love of the enemy to involve creatures that confront us as others and inspire fear in us. It involves loving and valuing others as God loves and values them. Ultimately, it is a God-centered (theocentric) view of an interconnected community of creatures that have their own intrinsic value ([11], citing Denis Edwards).*

### **2.3 Virtue ethics**

Virtue ethics takes into account the context of moral agency as does feminist care ethics. Context gives an opportunity to the moral agent to exercise her virtues. Moral principles are interpreted by someone virtuous enough to implement them properly. Thus virtues of character are antecedents to principles. One has to distinguish between what virtue is needed by a person to be environmentally virtuous and a general theory of virtue that would explain why being environmentally virtuous is part and parcel of being virtuous. In the second theory, environmental humility, sobriety, esthetic appreciation and openness, planetary solidarity, stewardship, loyalty and goodwill, recognition of nature's excellence, being an impartial observer lead to humility and gratitude, and encourages our own pursuit of excellence. According to what virtues are needed to be environmentally virtuous, whoever wants to be virtuous wants the material basis of this virtue to be lasting. Robert Sandler considers that whoever recognizes the intrinsic value of something, will apply to it the virtues of compassion, respect, and justice. In other words, virtue ethics focus on the kind of moral agent one wants to be rather than on her actions ([2, par 217; 17, 18]).

In Jamieson's quest for ethics for the Anthropocene, virtue ethics is privileged:

*Ethics for the Anthropocene would, in my view, rely on nourishing and cultivating particular character traits, dispositions, and emotions: what I shall call "virtues." These are mechanisms that provide motivation to act in our various roles from consumers to citizens in order to reduce greenhouse gases emissions and to a great extent ameliorate their effects regardless of the behavior of others. They also give us the resiliency to live meaningful lives even when our actions are not reciprocated ([4], p. 185).*

According to Jamieson, humility and temperance would be candidate virtues as well as mindfulness, i.e., "In order to improve our behavior we need to appreciate the consequences of our actions that are remote in time and space." Cooperation is important for collective action. Respect for nature means giving up its domination and our hubris. Finally, global justice among individuals (rather than states) is certainly a goal to pursue when the poor is the victim and the rich is the perpetrator. Jamieson shows that what is required is not so much distributive justice among states as among

individuals. He uses the example of car ownership as a proxy indicator for per capita energy uses and thus carbon emissions in 2010.

*The broad and sometimes surprising distribution of car ownership is shown by the fact that only six of the top ten countries in automobile ownership are among those countries required to fund the climate change activities of developing countries under the UNFCCC [United-Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change], while some of the 24 countries that are required to fund these activities are not among the top 24 countries in car ownership. What this means is that rich people who live in countries such as China and Russia escape obligations that attach to poor people who live in countries such as Ireland and Spain ([4], p. 197).*

The poor suffer disproportionately from climate-related impacts, even in rich countries. “A picture that views individual people in their various roles and relationships as the primary bearers and beneficiaries of duties and obligations is one that comports more naturally with the climate change problem than a picture that views nations as fundamental” ([4], p. 200). Jamieson then comes back to virtue ethics as the last raft to hang on: “Climate change threatens a great deal but it does not touch what ultimately makes our lives worth living: the activities we engage in that are in accordance with our values” ([4], p. 200). This is definitely depressing for a policy-maker! The encyclical pushes virtue ethics further than Jamieson: “Nevertheless, self-improvement on the part of individuals will not by itself remedy the extremely complex situation facing our world to-day...Social problems must be addressed by community networks and not simply by the sum of individual good deeds...” ([2], par 219). “Love...is also civic and political...social love...encourage a “culture of care” which permeates all of society...this too is part of our spirituality” ([2], par 231).

## 2.4 Ethics of relational values

Relational values are a relatively new category of value articulation, aimed at enriching the dichotomy between intrinsic values and instrumental values and eventually widening the consensus in environmental ethics ([19], p. 1). More precisely, relational values constitute an analytical framework to assess the ways people articulate the importance of ecosystem services in their specific, socio-culturally embedded language of valuation. The concept is based on the Heideggerian intuition that's entities are conditioned by relationships to the point one cannot tell which is the chicken and which is the egg. Actually, Muraca enlarges the category which includes instrumental values to one of relational values, i.e., values that lie in—and are not assigned to—relations. Humans can simply acknowledge or explicit these values. Relations are either functional between pre-existing entities or fundamental, i.e., constitutive of these entities and process-like. For example, land for indigenous people stands for the whole relationship system and has moral value. Fundamental relations are now members of the moral community. They hold the moral significance of entities holding inherent moral values but are not worthy of moral obligation. Instrumental values are functional relational while esthetic and spiritual values are intrinsic-eudemonistic because they are valued as constitutive of the good life and thus fundamental. Fundamental values are basic conditions for people to define themselves. They are not reducible to the benefits and services that they deliver as means like the instrumental values. What characterizes instrumental values is their substitutability ([20], p. 388).



The question arises about whether the encyclical considers relational values in an informal sense since an encyclical is not a contribution to philosophy, theology, ethics, or value articulation. Certainly, the encyclical is about relations. It deals with relations among humans, between humans and non-human nature, between humans and God, and even among persons within the Trinity ([3], p. 116). This is what constitutes integral ecology. The source of value is essentially God present in humans as well as in non-humans and vice-versa (panentheism). For Bonaventure, creation (persons, non-human nature animated or not) is the language of God. Since language is a means to relate to others, creation is relational in a fundamental way. For Bonaventure, since God is relational and God is present in all reality, all reality is relational. So all reality holds moral value. The remaining question is whether all reality is worthy of moral obligation; obviously, not all to the same degree. Certainly, the command “thou shalt not kill” does not apply in the same way to a human and to a spider. But a spider has, nevertheless, moral standing. I may not kill the former gratuitously even though I am allowed to kill it if it scares me (because for me, it does not hold esthetic or eudemonistic value).

*People also consider the appropriateness of how they relate with nature and with others, including the actions and habits conducive to a good life, both meaningful and satisfying. In philosophical terms, these are relational values (preferences, principles, and virtues associated with relationships, both interpersonal and as articulated by policies and social norms)... These include “eudaimonic” values, or values associated with a good life... ([21], p. 1462).*

*Many people believe that their cultural identity and well-being are derived from their relationships with human and nonhuman beings, mediated by particular places... Cultural services are thus better understood as the filters of value through which other ecosystem services and nature derive importance... Cultural considerations fit poorly into the instrumental framing of ecosystem services because they are inherently relational: cultural services are valued in the context of desired and actual relationships... ([21], pp. 1463–1464).*

*...the relational notion of eudaimonia (“flourishing”) entails reflection on the appropriateness of preferences, emphasizing that value is derived from a thing’s or act’s contribution to a good life, including adhering to one’s moral principles and maintaining the roots of collective flourishing.. ([21], p. 1464).*

*Conservation is still often thought of as something imposed on local peoples by outsiders; it must instead be seen as something we all negotiate collectively as good stewardship... environmental initiatives could solidify and adapt home-grown stewardship by leveraging social relationships ([21], p. 1464).*

IPBES [Intergovernmental Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services] has included relational values in its methodology ([20], p. 1).

Muradian and Pascual ([22], p. 12) identify 7 Relational Models (RM), each characterized by a set of specific social conventions, which can be briefly described as follows: detachment (nature as decor), devotion (non-human nature as superior to humans; deep ecology), domination (non-human nature as subordinate to humans; anthropocentrism), stewardship (humans sharing with non-human nature but also developing the latter), wardship (non-human nature as separate from humans but

with intrinsic value; biosphere reserves), utilization (non-human nature as separate from humans but without intrinsic value; utilitarian model), and ritualized exchange (nature as equal; native religions). Identifying the relevant RM is important because “RMs influence not only how problems are perceived, but also the notion of justice held, as well as the considered policy options and discourses for social mobilization” ([22], p. 13). These RM’s may be incommensurable and constrain trade-offs when various RM’s are held within a social group.” The main goal of valuation should be to identify and disentangle the (not always explicit) RMs involved in socio-environmental conflicts” ([22], p. 13).

Whichever ethics one wishes to adopt, it is clear that the stewardship ethics is insufficient to the task of caring for next of kin, whether human, animate or inanimate.

### **3. Creation theology and eco-theology**

#### **3.1 Eco-theology is not creation theology though these overlap**

Creation theology is just a chapter of systematic theology that deals with creation. It goes back to the Greek fathers of the Church. It has actually been codified at the Vatican I Council ([3], pp. 43–44). Eco-theology is much more recent. Eco-theology is a “theological perspective framed by concern for the environment” ([10], p. 2). Ernst Conradie, a South-African theologian, suggests Eco-theology should be regarded not as a sub-discipline of theology but rather as a mode of theological reflection or a reform movement that emerged in the years following the 1961 paper presented by Joseph Sittler, an American Lutheran theologian, at the New-Delhi meeting of the World Council of Churches ([10], p. 3). Sittler argued that the unity of the Church, founded in the reconciliation of all things (Col 1.15–20), is inseparable from ecology’s fate. The beginning of Eco-theology as a movement approximately coincided with the beginning of public environmental concern ([10], p. 3). Thus feminist theology (Mary Daly, Elizabeth Johnson, Sally McFague, Rosemary Radford Ruether) and liberation theology as applied to the environment (Leonardo Boff), and Lutheran contributions by theologians Joseph Sittler, Paul Santmire, John Cobb, and Jürgen Moltmann mark the beginnings of Eco-theology ([3], pp. 61–65). “...Like feminist theology eco-theology engages in a ‘twofold critique’, in that it offers a critique from the perspective of Christian theology on cultural and social institutions that underlie the ecological crisis and at the same time engages in the critique of Christian theology and praxis from an ecological perspective” ([10], p. 3). Eco-theology has American roots except for liberation theology and seems until recently to be mainly an Anglo-Saxon concern. While the discovery of biological evolution goes back principally to Charles Darwin, the evolutionary perspective on creation theology is very recent. It was born in the context of science-religion relations and owe its origin to Anglican theology, the British philosopher and theologian Alfred North Whitehead, the French Jesuit paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, and the following theologians: the German Karl Rahner, the American John Haught, the Dane Niels Gregersen who introduced the term “deep incarnation” (see *infra*), the British Christopher Southgate and Richard Bauckham, the Australian Denis Edwards, the American Celia Deane-Drummond and Sr. Ilia Delio among others. This current was imported in France and developed mainly by theologians François Euvé, Jacques Arnould, Jean-Michel Maldamé, Jean-Marc Moschetta and Fabien Revol.

In response to Lynn White's critique, his so-called "ecological complaint", "Santmire argues that the theological tradition is 'neither ecologically bankrupt' nor equipped with a great store of eco-theological traditions." ([10], p. 14). "Eco-theology should contribute to the ecological reformation of Christianity" ([11], p. 35) but "eco-theology is currently characterized by a number of different discourses" ([11], p. 64; [23], pp. 1954–1956) and "... does not have a particular theological methodology or group of methodologies which have enduring significance..." ([11], p. 64). Eco-theology also seeks an ortho-praxis, i.e. ways of living ecologically for a believer. The quest is not only moral; it is also spiritual.

Is *Laudato si'* a contribution to Eco-theology? It is obvious that panentheism, i.e. "the view that the divine reality is inclusive of and also immanent within the world" ([24], p. 2) is an important building block for Eco-theology, re-introduced in creation theology by Jürgen Moltmann ([3], pp. 66–67). It is present in *Laudato si'*. *Laudato si'* does not, however, consider the universe as the body of Christ as did S. McFague ([3], p. 77). The former does not go as far as claiming that God suffers with the world, i.e.,

*God is rather an active participant, experiencing and suffering with the environment and the various creatures (including human beings) which belong to it. This is what divine immanence demands. Just as human beings suffer with their bodies, so God suffers with the divine body of creation... for God too is counted among the victims of our ecological disregard... [Quoting Paul Fiddes], if God suffers then God too protests and a God who protests against suffering cannot be the cause of it, or God would be protesting against God.... God is not causing or willing our ecological crisis, but rather suffering its detriments.... ecological suffering can be viewed as the sacramental presence of the suffering God. To see the suffering of other creatures is to also see the suffering of the God immanent to them... ([25], pp. 12–13). [Quoting David Gray Griffin], "divine influence is understood as part and parcel of the world's normal causal relations and never an interruption thereof" ([25], p. 14)*

*[Quoting Ivone Gebara], "to speak of pan-en-theism is to consider the potentialities of the universe, the potentialities of life, and the potentialities of human life as always open-ended." ([25], p. 14).*

*Although immanent to God, the world retains its own creative freedom, a freedom which God necessarily works in and through to achieve the goodness of what can be. The naturalism of this "in and through" emerges as an invitation to act, a call to actualize in the world what God can only do through creatures ([25], p. 15).*

Eco-theology questions that humans have a special status within creation ([26], pp. 95–117). Eco-theologians attack the "dominion" and the "stewardship" doctrine, which are anthropocentric. Basic tenets of eco-theology are the idea of divine immanence in the whole cosmos; a relational, ecological rather than hierarchical understanding of God, humans, and the created world; a radically reinterpreted view of human dominion over nature in terms of partnership with nature; a commitment to justice for all creatures, not just humans, highlighting the needs of the impoverished masses and endangered species around the globe.

Clearly, Eco-theology has been strongly influenced by Whitehead's process philosophy and theology that John Cobb introduced in Eco-theology and "that sets forth a deeply incarnational God who is the fellow sufferer who understands". Teilhard de Chardin that the Catholic Church is slowly but partially rehabilitating

plaid an important role as well. As Eco-theology raises issues that are technical, any eco-theological story—including mine!—needs screening by professional theologians. My purpose is to disseminate a story as I understand it and not either contribute to it or criticize it [27].

Moltmann's theology, especially his re-introduction of panentheism, is oecumenical and relies on Jewish theology as well ([3], pp. 66–67). One can thus talk of a unified Christian and Jewish creation theology. As Christians and Jews make approximately 1/3 of mankind, the eco-theological story, therefore, matters.

### 3.2 The creation story revisited

Theology is always context-dependent. The context is cultural, sociological, and cosmological. It has changed tremendously in the 19th century under the influence of the mathematics of non-linear systems, quantum physics, the discovery of biological evolution and, generally, the progress of the sciences ([28], pp. 44–47). The cosmological context has evolved from the static one underlying the book of Genesis to the one of an expanding universe. In Genesis and some psalms, the earth was thought to be floating on water or supported by columns sunk in water under a sky to which the sun, moon, and stars are anchored. Part of the Christian cultural landscape until the end of the 19th century was the Aristotelian philosophy of the static essences rediscovered in the Middle Ages (Thomism) to be replaced by the dynamic visions of History by Hegel, Marx, and Whitehead among others.

Creation theology is in full transformation. Everything moves; everything is dynamic! The word of the Bible is static. There was a golden age, the earthly paradise. This paradise was lost because of original sin. God sent his son in order to restore earthly paradise. This static vision of things, which originated in the Mediterranean view of the world three thousand years ago, was dominant roughly until the Renaissance: the stationary earth and humans were the center of the universe.

### 3.3 The Christian eco-theological story of creation in point form as I understand it

Theologian Paul Tillich said of the story of creation in the book of Genesis that it is a myth. A myth is not a made-up story. It is an anthropological story that illustrates the fundamental relationship between God, mankind, and the balance of creation ([3], p. 33, 50). The doctrine of creation asserts that, at each instant, God is the creative foundation of all reality. “The creation stories in the book of Genesis contain, in their symbolic and narrative language, deep teachings about human existence and on its historical reality” says Pope Francis ([2], par 66). The story about this relationship is not limited to Genesis but permeates the entire Bible. Evolution means not only change but also continuity through diversification and complexification ([28], pp. 193–195, 266–268). Creation is not, therefore, simply a past event. The creation story implies that creation finds its origin in God. It does not provide a history of the beginnings of the universe.

During the Renaissance, with the developments of astronomy and of corresponding measuring instruments, thus science, the static vision of the book of Genesis eroded progressively. Revelation is not limited to the books of the Bible but is extended to the “book of nature” that Saint-Augustine and Saint-Bonaventure already spoke about and that Anglo—Saxon natural theology built upon. Sciences play an important role in deciphering this book of nature and allow thus a certain universality of knowledge that cultural conflicts are able to hide (e.g. the dominance of the Mediterranean culture in the Western world).



The creation story is at the same time utopian and eschatological. It is utopian to the extent that it aims at undoing our current predicament by human means. It is eschatological to the extent that it relies upon a divine promise of a better world and upon Providence ([3], pp. 33–38). This dynamic vision illuminated by science completes the biblical vision anticipating the promise. Creation is God's language (Bonaventure) through which God reveals Himself. Thus God has revealed Himself from the beginning of the universe. "God ...can be known with certitude by the natural light of human reason from created things" ([29], c.2; [30], par 6). Rather than seeing creation as a state to be restored, the contemporary creation story sees creation as a promise of a future state based on the hope of resurrection. Creation degradation results in the deterioration of God's language.

Before speaking of Messiah, savior, incarnation, the theme of the perpetual alliance between God and His creation is foremost in the Bible. The world, presently in constant evolution, is imperfect. It currently leaves room for corruption, to sin, to death. It tends however toward the fulfillment of the Promise. The incarnation is a project reflecting God's love for His creation despite the latter's imperfection. Incarnation is not so much due to the sin of mankind as to God's intent from time immemorial to enter into partnership (Alliance) with mankind. This is called deep incarnation. Incarnation is, therefore, not a Plan B but a Plan A ([31], p. 16).

Creation is also a gift ([2], par 76) completed with a promise. Within the anticipative perspective, creation is more a promise than a gift as creation is still unfinished. It is also a sacrament. In the Eucharistic bread, "creation is taut towards divinisation" ([2], par 236). The gift is the visible expression of God's love for an object, resulting in its goodness [Gn 1]), its intrinsic value, its holiness [1 Tim 4.3–5]. The sacrament reinforces creation's agency (e.g. water quenches thirst and purifies; bread and wine nourish; fire illuminates and purifies; oil feeds, perfumes, and illuminates). Sacraments do not sanctify the soul and body of humans only; they also deify nature. Environmental degradation desecrates creation; it is sacrilegious.

The universe will be deified, "eucharisticised" (Teilhard de Chardin), transfigured as Jesus was transfigured before the eyes of a few apostles [Mat 17.1–8, Mark 9.2–8, Luke 9.28–36]. Creation will become the resting place for God, the Sabbath of God, in which the entire creation will participate in a state of bliss. Creation will glorify its creator. The end of the universe is, therefore, not its demise but its eschatological transfiguration into a new creation, a process in, by, and for Christ: "the new Jerusalem" [Rev 21.2]. The purpose of the Sabbath—of the seventh day, of the seventh year—and of the biblical Jubilee is the restoration of the relations among humans and among them, the balance of creation and God. The Sabbath is a reminder of the Alliance among God, mankind, and the balance of creation. Humans occupy a special place in creation but, in exchange, they hold a special responsibility for the latter, its evolution, and well-being. This is where eco-theology comes in.

Christ was present at the origin of the universe. He is responsible for its evolution. He will be responsible for its eschatological transformation into a new creation. "Christ is the redeemer of the whole process of creation" ([32], p. 106). This is a deep incarnation.

Christ is contemporaneous to the creation and, therefore, precedes the man Jesus. Christ fulfills a function: he participated in the original creation, partakes in the continuous creation, and will participate in the eschatological one as well. "Christ has not been an already accomplished character from the beginning of the universe. He achieves his accomplishment in the accomplishment of the world and the world

reaches its accomplishment in Christ” ([31], p. 5). Being Christ is not a name only but a function that does not coincide with the one of Jesus. Christ’s function is a cosmic one. Christ is “...recognized as the universal and trans-historical figure of God who unites with creation without being shut off in the singularity of this union” [33].

When God sends his son in order to save the universe from its imperfection, the son fills the entire universe through his resurrection. The function of Christ is to perfect and unify the universe, to synthesize creation and redemption. “In him, everything holds together” [Col 1.17]. Christ is the beginning of everything because, without him, nothing can exist. He is also the first of the universe, i.e., its most important character. He is the end of the universe as well because the whole universe, through its evolution identified by science, tends toward him because of mankind’s co-creative action in unity with Christ (Teilhard de Chardin’s omega). “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the Last, the beginning and the end.” [Rev 22.13–14].

It is customary to divide the creation story into the original, the continuous and the new one.

### *3.3.1 The original creation*

“All things came into being through him [God], and without him, not one thing came into being” [Jn, 1.3]. Creation is such an eternal act of intra-Trinitarian love that it is impossible to identify creation’s beginning ([28], p. 218). Creation ex nihilo does not mean bringing into existence (efficient cause) but rather everlastingly optimizing goodness in creation through attraction (final cause) ([28], pp. 217–218).

The universe is completely distinct from God. This means that the universe is not God (no pantheism) even though God is present everywhere (panentheism).

### *3.3.2 The continuous creation*

Since the universe is in constant evolution, it is imperfect. Moral imperfection is only one facet of this universal imperfection. An imperfect universe needs a redeemer. Original sin is not a historical event due to mankind only, therefore, but also to a condition that affects matter and History ([28], p. 343).

After the Great Flood episode, God made with Noah and the whole creation a perpetual Alliance whose sign is the rainbow [Gn, 9.8–13]. The Alliance is foremost in the Bible and was reaffirmed many times: to Abraham and his descendants first with the circumcision and the promised land [Gn 17, Gn 28. 13] then to Jacob [Lev 26.42] and then to Moses with the ten commands [Ex 34.1] and the promised land again. It was renewed in the person of Jesus (the Savior, descendant from David) who said He came not to abolish the Law but to accomplish it [Mat 5.17–18]. It is nowadays being renewed constantly through the Eucharist, the new Alliance manifestation [Luke 22.20].

Creation is called the external alliance by the reformed theologian Karl Barth because creation needed to occur before one is able to establish an alliance therewith. Barth calls the incarnation the internal alliance because incarnation leads to salvation, i.e. justification through grace. The latter as well as creation are a gift from God. Salvation is the new creation that encompasses the whole of nature. Creation assigns a cosmic dimension to salvation [Rev 21, 22].

God is the master of creation. When Genesis says that Adam was created in the image of God and to His likeness [Gn 1.26] and that Adam had the right to name the animals [Gn, 2.19–20], God did not yield the mastery of creation to mankind.

A person is only “dust from the ground” [Gn 2.7] and not separate from the balance of creation.

God’s image is given to mankind. His likeness must be acquired through a virtuous life ([3], p. 70). The Greek fathers of the Church will fine-tune this statement: the deep meaning of mankind created in the image of God and cooperating with Him is that mankind becomes like God through the influence of the Holy Spirit. Humans are creation’s stewards only, kings of creation in the manner of Christ, i.e. creation’s servants. They empathize with creation’s suffering, protect creation and make it grow (parable of the talents [Mat 25.14–30]). If they do not do this, they disobey God. Christ, being in the image of God as well, is also responsible for creation stewardship. The Catholic Church relies on the prophets [Hos 4.2–3; Is 24.4–5] to tie ecological injustice to social injustice. This tie needs to be restored ([32], p. 85).

God inhabits his creatures. This is the foundation of the sacramental approach to creation. The latter underlines the continuity between humans and the balance of creation. There is a continuity between the social and the ecological. Communion is the fundamental structure of everything which exists.

The relation of a person with a personal God must allow this person to personify the world (Vladimir Lossky). It is the care ethic that *Laudato si’* emphasizes and which leads to this personification which allows transcending matter’s limits. This is why creation awaits with impatience the revelation of God’s children [Rom 8.19]. The sacramental approach reveals the insufficiency of the stewardship concept discovered by hermeneutics because humans belong more to nature than the balance of creation belongs to humans.

The person is the priest of creation, i.e., celebrates the latter. Creation is called to enter into communion with its creator through the human person and conversely. All components of creation are integrated into celebrations to be offered to God and transformed through His spirit. “The Eucharist is intrinsically an act of cosmic love.” ([2], par 236) “..The Eucharist is the privileged locus where God is present now to our world as a part of this world” [34].

### *3.3.3 The new creation*

The future of the universe is a promise based on the hope for resurrection. Creation is not a gift only. The universe has no end. It will not be destroyed but will not subsist in its current state. Deuteronomy speaks of a promised land to all creation while Exodus speaks of liberation from a land of oppression and Saint Paul speaks of future liberation, conditional upon human behavior or service. “The natural world is spirituality’s true home rather than a far-removed prophetic aspiration to a heaven—elusive state of perfection detached from the earth” ([32], p. 41). The current cosmology replaces Genesis’ cosmology. Mankind’s well-being depends on the planet’s well-being.

The person is prophet to the extent the former understands the divine design for creation.

When God sent his son to save the universe from its imperfections, the son filled the entire universe through his resurrection. Christ is cosmic: his role is to perfect and unify the universe, to synthesize creation and redemption. Christ is the beginning of everything because, without him, nothing can exist. He is also the first in the universe because the whole universe, in its evolution noted by science, tends towards Him because of the shared co-creative action of humans united in Christ (Teilhard de Chardin’s omega). The fathers of the Greek Church in the first centuries of our

common era were interested in creation within the framework of the cosmic Christ, i.e., Christ present everywhere in the real world. The eschatological purpose of History is to "...reunite the whole universe under one leader, Christ, what is in heaven and on earth" [Ep 1.10].

Through the visible Christ (under His human appearance), we know God but in an imperfect manner [1 Cor 13. 12].

Christ existed before all creatures and is more than the latter. Therefore, everything which has been created, be they angels, humans, or the balance of nature, has been created for Christ and thus for God and is maintained in its existence by Him and for Him.

All of mankind is called to become in Christ similar to Christ. The whole universe in its diversity will be united to Christ because Christ is present in all its components (panentheism). The Church is destined to be the gathering around Christ of all humans united in one body.

Christ is the first to resurrect. Christ's resurrection secures the resurrection of the whole universe. Christ by His death and resurrection obtained victory over the cosmic forces of evil. The latter is responsible for suffering and death which affect the whole of nature. Nature, including humans, must also suffer and die to reach its transfiguration.

Victory over the cosmic forces of evil is a decisive victory, but it requires still extension in space and in time in order to reach the whole of mankind. Despite Christ's victory through His resurrection, the demonic elements of death, sin and chaos operate in the universe. Before His resurrection, Christ necessarily had to suffer and die since He assumed our human condition through his incarnation ([3], p. 197; [35], pp. 36–43).

The balance of nature is the passive victim of the Fall. "...in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage..." [Rom 8.20–21], creation awaits its liberation because of the active human cooperation towards this goal.

Christ's resurrection insured the redemption not only of humans but of the whole universe. This redemption was needed since creation is imperfect. Humans and nature are interdependent as asserted by ecology and the Fall story.

"God became man so as a man could become God" (Irenaeus) or, more exactly, according to all the Greek fathers of the Church "the Son of God became man so as for men to become sons of God" by adoption ([3], p. 197). This statement is not limited to mankind. The whole universe is recapitulated in Christ. Thus, incarnation, as well as redemption, are cosmic events.

### **3.4 The eco-theological utopia**

Through her prophetic role, the human being understands the divine design of creation that Revelation teaches her, but creation needs the human being to manifest its potentialities. This is where the Christian utopia joins eschatology.

The transfiguration of nature depends on us because "creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay" [Rom 8.20] because of evil that exists in the imperfect creation. According to Maxim the Confessor, one of the Greek Church's fathers, God planned the universe so that the latter could unite with His divinity, but mankind turned its back on God's plan.

One action which is required from us is, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to wait with perseverance for Christ's return. Another is to change the existing situation of domination over other human beings and over the balance of nature ([2], par 224) while collaborating on the transformation of the universe in view of Christ's return. Because of its incompleteness, the universe laments about its disharmony and is divided.



It is humanity that must first find its unity again and then be the mediator and prophet between the balance of the universe and its creator in order for the universe to be transfigured through grace and to find its unity. This mediator's role consists in seeing the reason for the created world through contemplation, beyond appearances, the relation between a given creature and its creator as the one of "the rising sun with the things it illuminates" (Maxim the Confessor), and live in the cosmic energy that is love, according to God's design ([3], p. 198).

The whole of human destiny, as the one of the universe, is one of growth and maturation "day after day and ascending towards perfection, i.e. approaching the One who was not created, will not be complete in this life, but will continue in the other" (Irenaeus) ([3], p. 198). It is the prophetic meaning of the Christian utopia. This meaning would not exist without the eschatological one of the resurrection, which needed itself because of the myth of the Fall. O felix culpa (culpa as flaw)!

#### **4. Conclusion**

Pope Francis considers it to be among his prerogatives to intervene in the ecological arena. He is convinced mankind needs to change its culture, to make an "ecological conversion". The predominant culture since the advent of the sciences has been that the environment is an open-access resource, i.e. a public good with unrestricted access. Since the nineteen-fifties, large-scale pollution of the air and of the rivers has been an unmistakable early warning sign that the open-access mentality was destroying the environment and its public good features, i.e. non-excludability of any economic agent from the good and non-rivalry in the latter's consumption.

The open-access culture is not biblical. The Bible sees the environment as a commons, a divine gift that mankind is expected to revere, develop, and share as a common inheritance within and across generations according to its creator's intent. The pope proposes Francis of Assisi's spirituality—articulated in a philosophical system by Bonaventure—as the model for the new culture. The stewardship model proposed by the Greeks, the Stoicians, and the Christian churches do not suffice. It needs to be completed by an ethics of care which not only assigns intrinsic value—whose origin is God himself—to all creation but treats the latter as close kin. The aboriginal culture does this to some extent already since kinship with the earth is part of the aboriginal identity. This is one reason why the latter needs preservation. The ethics underlying the relatively new relational valuation current may bridge the various ethical reference frameworks, stewardship, care, and virtue ethics especially. Whether the intrinsic value is assigned to everything created or to relations with everything created matters little as long as relational values are recognized. These are three alternative ethical frameworks that may jointly assign intrinsic value to creation and lead to the needed cultural change.

Climate change took over from place-based pollution as being the global pollution problem which, with the ozone hole and threatened global biodiversity, is affecting the entire planet. Planetary problems and the Anthropocene that they characterize had to be discovered by science first and, especially, by multidisciplinary science organized in networks. As the latter's conclusions were incompatible with vested interests in the statu quo, the validity of the science was systematically questioned as well as the degree of certainty of its results. Science is no substitute for policy, however both do not use the same discourse. As, since the Middle Ages, the planet organized politically along with nation-states and since nation-states are generally not ecosystem-based, a coordinated solution to planetary problems has eluded the

200-odd nation-states which cover the earth. No effective international environmental institutional regime exists yet. Nation-states have great difficulties implementing any international coordinated action within their own borders as well. Science tells us there is little time left for effective action. As environmental policies need to be supplemented with culture and life-styles changes and as these are slow-moving, it is likely that coordinated action will be implemented too little too late. Environmental problems of the Anthropocene are “wicked problems” [4].

The Compendium of the social doctrine of the Catholic Church is poorly integrated with ecology and thus does not achieve what Pope Francis wishes it to achieve ([6], Section 4). However, the potential for a mobilizing “grand-narrative” lies there. In particular, the theological introduction to the chapter of the Compendium dealing with environment is sound but could be enriched with eco-theology whose fundamental message is that “the future of God and the future of the world are integrated” ([28], p. 311). The Christian “grand-narrative” sufficiently jibes with other religions’ narratives to make a religious alliance possible ([36], pp.70-80). In 2012, 1/3 of mankind was Christian and 84% of mankind allegedly belonged to some sort of religion [37]. As the Moslem religious membership is expected to be the religious group growing the fastest and reach nearly the same proportion as Christians in 2050, where the effort has to be placed is obvious. Moslem creation theology has many similarities with the Christian one [38]. Pope Francis seems to understand this [39]. Environmentally-motivated people might be able to join this religious coalition if skillfully assembled. Whether this grand narrative, while in competition with other narratives, will be sufficient to mobilize the remaining religious people towards the required ecological conversion and towards an outward-oriented “new evangelization” with an ecological dimension remains to be seen. The eco-theological grand narratives, while still in their infancy and in need of dissemination, are hopefully capable of mobilizing as were Teilhard de Chardin’s writings.

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