

Our Faith in Creation, God's Faith in Humanity: Edward Schillebeeckx and Pope Francis on Human Transcendence and an Anthropocentric Cosmos

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Daniel Minch 

University of Graz, Graz, Austria

Abstract

Edward Schillebeeckx's theology of creation can serve as a foundation for authentic Christian self-understanding in relation to the ecological crisis. Schillebeeckx provides a Thomistic view of humanity and creation as both autonomous and "given" from God. Schillebeeckx's anthropocentric "creation faith" and nuanced view of secularization provide a way of preserving the uniqueness of humanity without devaluing nature. Structural parallels with Pope Francis's *Laudato Si'* are developed in order to provide a fundamental-theological foundation for determining the proper role of human beings in relation to creation.

Keywords

creation faith, creation theology, eschatology, ontology, finitude, Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, Edward Schillebeeckx, secularization, theological anthropology

The way that humanity understands itself in relation to social, historical, and cosmological factors helps to determine how we act in the world. This is especially significant because "the world" is increasingly marked by various

Corresponding author:

Daniel Minch, University of Graz, Heinrichstraße 78a, 8010 Graz, Austria

Email: daniel.minch@uni-graz.at

interrelated crises. Therefore, the forms of sociopolitical action that we undertake in response to critical situations, especially the mounting challenge of global climate change, are partially determined by our self-understanding. In the recent past, the dominant economic view of the world and of humanity has often led us to hide or deny the scale of the ecological crisis, or to suggest that solutions will naturally emerge from within the free market system itself. From the Christian perspective, human self-understanding also involves both our view of the divine and our relationship to the natural world, and thereby affects how we act in and through forms of social representation. Within the field of Catholic fundamental theology, we can draw on the insights of the First Vatican Council which saw a connection between our knowledge of natural things and our knowledge of God, as well as the Second Vatican Council which recognized that revelation about God is also an insight into the nature of humanity.¹ There is, therefore, a necessary involvement of humanity in creation in order to know God, as well as a reciprocal relationship between our understanding of God and of ourselves. These relationships matter for Christian attempts to deal, both practically and theologically, with the ecological crisis. As governments, communities, and ecclesial bodies reckon with the problem, it is the task of theology to work out fundamental images of humanity and creation in relation to God attuned to the demands of tradition and the urgency of the time. Essentially, we need to begin to have “faith” in creation again in a way that does not degrade and instrumentalize nature, but which still affirms human freedom and agency in order to change the situation. This is especially the case in the industrialized West, where an instrumental view of nature has long been dominant and has reciprocally enhanced the “economic” view of humanity.

In this regard, Edward Schillebeeckx’s concept of “creation faith” (*Scheppingsgeloof*) can provide such a Christian non-instrumental, yet still “anthropocentric” view of creation. Furthermore, Schillebeeckx’s work gives us a foundation to better interpret the call made by Pope Francis in his 2015 encyclical, *Laudato Si’*, to “protect our common home” through a conversion of humanity to forms of “sustainable and integral development.”² In this article, I will explicate what Schillebeeckx means by “creation faith”—his articulation of the Christian belief in God as creator and in creation itself as a free gift of God’s grace. This also requires defining “creation” and what precisely it is to be a “creature” in relation to God and the world. Schillebeeckx’s creation faith is especially relevant in light of the contemporary ecological crisis thanks to his nuanced view of humanity in relation to the history of secularization. I will first show what Schillebeeckx means by “creation faith” and how he grounds his own thought in that of Thomas Aquinas. I will then detail the ways that Schillebeeckx’s creation theology affected his understanding and engagement with the

1. Pius IX, *Constitutio dogmatica: Dei Filius*, (April 24, 1870), 2.2, <https://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-ix/1a/documents/constitutio-dogmatica-dei-filius-24-aprilis-1870.html>; *Gaudium et Spes* (December 7, 1965), 11, 22, 38, 40, 41, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html (hereafter cited as *GS*).

2. Francis, *Laudato Si’* (May 24, 2015), 13, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_encyclica-laudato-si.html (hereafter cited as *LS*).

process of “secularization,” which is intimately connected to both creaturely finitude and freedom exercised in the world. This leads to a detailed illustration of the unique nature of human transcendence in Schillebeeckx’s work, and how this impacts our interaction with nature and our relation to God. I will then turn to Pope Francis’s creation theology in order to demonstrate that he shares Schillebeeckx’s essentially “Thomistic” structure and pre-suppositions. I will delineate the important ways in which Schillebeeckx’s complex theological-philosophical account of creation is affirmed by and helps to undergird Pope Francis’s views. They differ, however, over the degree to which human transcendence can be considered unique and in what ways creation can be said to “praise” the Creator. In the final sections, I will attempt to mediate this difference through an appeal to the universal salvific nature of the Incarnation, while illustrating the implications of this integral view of creation for human self-understanding. I will do this through appeals to both the symbolic function of humanity as the sign and instrument of God in history, as well as narrative considerations of Jesus’s activity as the symbol of God in the Gospels (primarily the Gospel of Mark). Ultimately, Schillebeeckx provides a fundamental-theological framework for a pastorally oriented, and politically active, faith that is well grounded in the Judeo-Christian tradition and critically attuned to the contemporary context.

The Contours of “Creation Faith”

Although Edward Schillebeeckx never systematically articulated the meaning and content of “creation faith” in a full monograph, his theology of creation retains an important, yet somewhat hidden role in his overall theological vision. Like many aspects of Schillebeeckx’s theology, creation is a major and remarkably consistent theme that never received the sustained attention that it perhaps warranted. This is similar to the themes of theological anthropology, eschatology, and even theological hermeneutics. These themes appear in nearly every one of his publications from the 1960s onward, even if they are at times only partially elaborated or somewhat obscured by other interests. All of his major works presuppose the doctrine of creation, as it is interrelated with Christology, soteriology, and eschatology, none of which can be separated from one another in any absolute manner.

In 1982, Schillebeeckx clearly stated that he considered his theological foundation to be a Thomistic one.³ His doctoral studies in Paris under Marie-Dominique Chenu and the professors at the Dominican study house Le Saulchoir in Etolles were formative for his life and later theology, since it was there that he learned to read Thomas from a historical-contextual perspective, and not as a series of unconnected articles and propositions. Although strict adherence to Thomas was necessary for Catholic theologians in the 1940s and 1950s, Chenu’s approach placed Thomas within the historical situation of the thirteenth century, and clearly showed that he was a theologian in tune with the time in which he had lived.⁴ After his relatively brief stay in Paris, Schillebeeckx returned to Leuven in

3. Edward Schillebeeckx, *God Is New Each Moment*, trans. David Smith (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1983), 67–70.

4. Thomas F. O’Meara and Paul Philibert, *Scanning the Signs of the Times: French Dominicans in the Twentieth Century* (Adelaide: ATF Theology, 2013), 22–26.

1947 to teach theology. His courses were, naturally for the time, quite Thomistic in content.⁵ In fact, his first two major works, *De sacramentele heilseconomie* (1952) and *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* (1959), were explicitly “Thomistic” in their subject, sourcing, and orientation.⁶ In the period after Vatican II, Schillebeeckx departed from this style in favor of the language of contemporary philosophical hermeneutics. Even in his later theology, however, when direct references to the works of Thomas Aquinas were rare, Schillebeeckx maintained an essentially “Thomistic” understanding of grace and creation. This has, at times, been mistaken for a broad optimism or naïve trust in modernity. Far from being a blind optimist, Schillebeeckx was deeply committed to the cause of humanity because he was ultimately convinced that true human flourishing, in whatever sense that was understood, aimed at the eschatological fulfillment of humanity in God. God’s cause is ultimately also that of humanity, as is evident through the historical life and praxis of Jesus of Nazareth.⁷ Schillebeeckx points specifically to Jesus’s practice of table fellowship and his conduct as bringing people experiences of liberation and salvation.⁸ It is through this very ordinary, earthly activity of Jesus that the nearness of the rule of God could be experienced, not purely as an “other” realm of mystified and esoteric experience, but by a reordering of daily life in a liberating way. God was experienced as active in and through Jesus’s deeds, giving early Christians a *realized* eschatology where creation itself was the site of salvation, and not an apocalyptic kingdom that would merely replace the current world with an entirely new one.⁹

Schillebeeckx on Creation in Relation to Augustine and Thomas

In thinking about creation, Schillebeeckx prefers to begin from the created world itself, and not by automatically subordinating creation to “redemption.” He criticizes a broadly “Augustinian” interpretation of sin and redemption, and with it a certain

5. Erik Borgman, *Edward Schillebeeckx: A Theologian in His History*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Continuum, 2003), 191–232, 249–69.

6. Henricus Edward Schillebeeckx, *De sacramentele heilseconomie: Theologische bezinning op S. Thomas’ sacramentenleer in het licht van de traditie en van de hedendaagse sacramentsproblematiek* (Antwerp/Bilthoven: ‘t Groeit & H. Nelissen, 1952); Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter of God*, trans. Paul Barrett and Lawrence Bright, *Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx* 1 (London: Bloomsbury, 2014); Joris Geldhof, “The Early and Late Schillebeeckx OP on Rituals, Liturgies, and Sacraments,” *Usus Antiquior* 1 (2010): 132–50, <https://doi.org/10.1179/175789410x12729674261065>. The 1959 version of *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* is the second edition (and third printing), revised and expanded, of his 1957 book *De Christusontmoeting als sacrament van de Godsontmoeting* (“The Encounter with Christ as the Sacrament of the Encounter with God”).

7. Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, trans. Hubert Hoskins and Marcelle Manley, *Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx* 6 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 44 [62], 213 [240], 570 [608]. All references to Schillebeeckx’s *Collected Works* also give the original English pagination in square brackets.

8. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 176–93 [200–19].

9. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 162 [185].

conception of creation. Here, the natural state of things is seen as *natura corrupta*, after having previously existed in a state of perfection, or near-perfect existence and immortality.¹⁰ Such a conception of creation allows many aspects of nature to be interpreted as punishments or flaws of a corrupted nature, which in turn casts Jesus in stark relief with all that is worldly and fallen; redemption becomes the only lens through which we can see the world, and it does not yield a very positive view. The early medieval Augustinian synthesis portrayed creation as a cosmocentric and inviolable order maintained by divine fiat.¹¹ The physical and social orders were a part of the divine act of creation that occurred at the beginning of time, and was to be maintained or else we would risk violating the immutable will of the creator and the order of the universe. This order is necessary above all in humanity's corrupted state in order to properly constrain human desires and even as appropriate chastisement through submission to authorities. Such an "Augustinian synthesis" is particularly problematic for the modern world because we do not share the same conceptual horizon of early medieval Europe, and are therefore confronted with a hermeneutical problem with regard to interpretative and experiential horizons.

As early as 1964, Schillebeeckx already complained that a "certain Augustinianism," that reinforced the perceived dualism between "church" and "world" was affecting the debates at the council regarding "Schema XIII," the document that became *Gaudium et Spes*. Schillebeeckx resisted this cosmocentric, "Augustinian pessimism" by retrieving authors like Aquinas and Albert the Great who possessed a more nuanced understanding of humanity's role in the natural world and the meaning of "second causes."¹² He advocated for a kind of Thomistic anthropocentrism which does not minimize the "demonic aspects" of history, but views them in a different light—all of creation was made to be good, and that "goodness is not cancelled out by man's sin." Rather, this primordial goodness is qualified and obscured by sin.¹³

Schillebeeckx saw this Scholastic turn as the beginning of "secularization," or "the natural consequence of the discovery and gradual widening of man's [*sic*] rational sphere of understanding." This occurred chiefly by bringing in a view of human nature based on natural law and placing it between divine law and the human conscience.¹⁴

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10. Schillebeeckx, *God Is New Each Moment*, 68. Cf. Augustine, *The City of God (De Civitate Dei) XI–XXII*, 14.12–13, 15, trans. William Babcock, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, Part 1 (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2012), 7:xx.
 11. Edward Schillebeeckx, "Secularization and Christian Belief in God," in *God the Future of Man*, trans. N. D. Smith, *Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx 3* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 31 [54]. Schillebeeckx does not seem to be directly critical of Augustine himself in most cases, but rather of a particular cosmocentric and "pessimistic" reading of Augustine.
 12. Edward Schillebeeckx, "Church and World," in *World and Church*, *Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx 4* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 83 [110].
 13. Schillebeeckx, *God Is New Each Moment*, 68.
 14. Schillebeeckx, "Secularization and Christian Belief in God," 34–35 [57–58]; cf. Patrick Masterson, "The Coexistence of Man and God in the Philosophy of Saint Thomas Aquinas," in *Images of Man in Ancient and Medieval Thought: Studia Gerardo Verbeke ab Amicis et*

Schillebeeckx understood this “Christian secularization” as an attempt to assert that human beings played an important role *within* God’s creation and contributed to the humanization of the world.¹⁵ “Humanization” essentially means shaping the physical and social environment to meet the needs of humanity in a way that actively improves the lives of people in history. Obviously, not all human efforts have good results, and therefore “hominization,” human manipulation of reality, is not necessarily “humanization,” which implies actually building a more human future for all.¹⁶ What is characteristic of secularization is its orientation toward the future, for which humanity is responsible and plans “within a rational and cognitive horizon.”¹⁷ Schillebeeckx believed that secularization was misunderstood within the church (and especially by Pope John Paul II), which produced an oppositional attitude against modernity and a program of selective “return” to the Christian Europe of the first millennia.¹⁸ This explained, for Schillebeeckx, the emphasis on “premodern” thought patterns and models of ministry, church governance, and of human nature, which do not necessarily include modern values such as human rights, freedom of conscience, and freedom of religion.¹⁹ On a deeper, theological level, however, it also does not properly discern the relation between nature and grace, and the autonomous nature of creation itself as given.

The Autonomy of Creation

In an interview from 1999, Schillebeeckx made clear the place of creation and its givenness:

The most important thing I learned from St. Thomas is the fact that this world has its own order or regularity. It is ruled by its own laws. “*Gratia supponit naturam, gratia elevat naturam.*” According to St. Thomas creation is fundamentally good, and its goodness can not [*sic*] be extinct by sin. Sin is “younger” than the goodness of creation. This insight opens our eyes for the autonomy of the creature. Even in reconciliation and in salvation the autonomy of man plays its proper role.²⁰

Collegis Dicata, ed. Gérard Verbeke and Fernand Bossier, Symbolae Facultatis Litterarum et Philosophiae Lovaniensis: Series A (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1976), 1:335–51.

15. Cf. Henri de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: Herder and Herder/Crossroad, 1998), 105–15, 127–39.
16. Schillebeeckx, “Secularization and Christian Belief in God,” 38 [64].
17. Edward Schillebeeckx, *I Am a Happy Theologian: Conversations with Francesco Strazzari*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1994), 43.
18. Schillebeeckx, *I Am a Happy Theologian*, 43.
19. Schillebeeckx, *I Am a Happy Theologian*, 43; Edward Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God*, trans. John Bowden, Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx 10 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 216–19 [218–21].
20. Edward Schillebeeckx, “Scholastic Concepts Tend to Become Almost Eternal Concepts,” interview by Eric Luijten, Thomas Instituut te Utrecht, February 16, 1999, http://www.thomasinstituut.org/nws.php?nws_id=32.

Following this Thomistic orientation, God has placed a certain amount of trust in creation.²¹ This trust is manifest in the autonomy of creation as free in and for itself, which extends to creatures that also take a measure of responsibility for the world in which they find themselves. These creatures and, above all, humanity as a rational being are invested with that freedom and responsibility. Unfortunately, that original freedom of the world has, in terms of human history, become something of a disaster, or, as Schillebeeckx comments in his reading of Genesis, “a growing human history of sinfulness and murder.”²² Even so, the covenant that God has with creation is not withdrawn, and God remains faithful to the free promise made through God's act of creation. In fact, the redemption that comes from Christ is partially visible in his historical life and praxis:

Christology is creation underlined, concentrated, and condensed: faith in creation *as God wishes it to be*. It is not a matter of a new plan of God directed toward creation as some religions or sects interpret certain existential experiences, but indeed of the supreme manifestation of being eternally new and at the same time constant and faithful, the being of God that we can perceive to a certain degree only in continued creation.²³

Such an affirmation of the autonomy of creation allows us to best define “creation” as what is “not-God,” but nonetheless it originates from and remains close to God.

The doctrine of creation is not, above all, an explanation for the world or for humanity as it is. This is the importance of Schillebeeckx's shift away from the cosmocentric view of creation, which saw God as first and last cause in a way that permanently embedded both God and humanity in a hierarchically ordered sort of “chain of being.” Such a view could be used to justify or to explain the existing order of the world from the idealized order of creation. Not so for a properly anthropocentric model of creation which possesses an authentic creaturely freedom. A belief in either God or creation, “does not claim to give an explanation of the origin of the world.”²⁴ By making God a direct explanation for “why things and events are what they are, then every attempt to change these is indeed blasphemous.”²⁵ Such a cosmocentric view can easily slide into religious fundamentalism that necessarily sees social change as a deviation from God's order. Further, a “direct” relationship between God's fiat and every element of existence encourages images of a “God of the gaps” who is the immediate principle of anything that cannot be explained.

21. Philip Kennedy, “God and Creation,” in *The Praxis of the Reign of God: An Introduction to the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx*, ed. Mary Catherine Hilkert and Robert J. Schreiter, 2nd ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 43.

22. Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 243 [245].

23. Edward Schillebeeckx, “I Believe In Jesus of Nazareth: The Christ, the Son of God, the Lord,” *The Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 17 (1980): 18–32 at 20.

24. Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 227 [229].

25. Edward Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report on the Books “Jesus” and “Christ”*, trans. John Bowden, *Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx* 8 (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 102 [116].

As the immediate cause of that which is not readily explicable, it becomes easy to implicate God directly in the evil and suffering that we encounter in the world. We can recognize here a kind of “vengeful God” ideology often espoused by fundamentalist groups that associates human suffering—the causes of which are complex historical realities resulting from either the contingency of nature or the long and intricate history of human sin and failure—as direct examples of divine judgment. On the other hand, more modernistic and progressive movements tend to minimize the severity of suffering in favor of a direct identification between “salvation” and historical processes. History is animated by a “divine” principle (i.e. God, *Geist*, the invisible hand of the market, Enlightened Reason, etc.) and inevitably moves toward fulfillment. In one model, God metes out divine justice to the wicked; in the other model, “God” rewrites instances of suffering as secretly good or productive moments that move history toward its greater perfection.²⁶ In either case, ethics merely becomes a matter of *insight* into the form and order of “divine” providence. Historicity would also be unimportant, since what matters is the transhistorical utopian reality that we can aspire to recreate from a lost perfected age, or that will be achieved through linear progression in time. Either view, Schillebeeckx argues, is structurally identical and presents “human history as a large-scale Muppet show!”²⁷ The contemporary continuation of both of these idolatrous images of God and creation in various, even expressly secular or atheistic forms (e.g. scientific optimism, Communism, blind trust in economic progress, etc.) illustrates the power that they exercise in human thought patterns, as well as the necessity to correct them. The belief in God and the doctrine of creation are in no way explanations for the intricacies of history and nature, and to use them as such would be to mistake questions about the working of nature and history, for the basic question of being as such: Why is there something rather than nothing?

Secularization and Secularity

Schillebeeckx adheres to the Thomistic principle that creation “exhibits the effects, so to speak, of divine activity” and therefore it is appropriate to speak about God as the cause and origin, as well as the ultimate end, or future of all that is.²⁸ God is present in creation, but not in a way that impinges on the autonomy of creation. Further, God can in fact be known indirectly from the facticity of finite creation, and especially through a reflection on human experience. This is not an easy claim to make, but Schillebeeckx does it in a remarkably original way that leads us to explore the issue of secularization more deeply. First, we have to distinguish between secularization, secularism, and “the secular” in Schillebeeckx’s thought. As we have seen, secularization is a historical process: the expansion and realization of humanity’s rational and technical capacities

26. Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report*, 102 [116].

27. Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 227 [230].

28. Kennedy, “God and Creation,” 40; see Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1, q. 1, a. 7, ad 1; Martin G. Poulson, *The Dialectics of Creation: Creation and the Creator in Edward Schillebeeckx and David Burrell* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 145–47.

harnessed to reshape our social and physical environment. This is accompanied by the gradual rejection of nature as an unchangeable divine “order” and the acceptance of the independence and freedom of the world.²⁹ As noted above, Schillebeeckx sees this as stemming from the thirteenth-century *theological* realization of an independent human nature governed by natural law that is not immediately identical with divine law. This allowed for the development of the human conscience and rational human thought in a “horizontal,” immanent direction, while still maintaining the supernatural *telos* for humankind in God.³⁰ Because the process is historical and all human efforts contingent, the results of the actual “reshaping” of the world as a humanized environment are various and flawed. In particular, Schillebeeckx sees the development of a theory of *pura natura* as a misstep in the theological attempts at secularization. Such a radical “horizontal” development of humanity with both a purely natural and supernatural end was meant as an affirmation of creation and safeguard for both God’s transcendence and the gratuity of grace. When pushed to an extreme, however, versions of the *pura natura* theory fostered fideism and an extrinsic view of God and grace.³¹ Increasingly, from the sixteenth century on, the concept of God fell outside of the realm of human reason, effectively limiting human recognition of divine activity, just as the capacity of humanity to shape the world through rational action was on the rise. In some cases, this resulted in discarding the divine element altogether and direct antagonism with religion as “irrational” and detrimental to human progress; that is, secularism.

Secularism is, when closely examined, not coterminous with secularization. In the service of an authentic creation faith, this distinction continues to be important for us today.³² “Secularism” should be understood as an ideological, anti-religious program of rational control of the world through technological and political means. The church has, in Schillebeeckx’s opinion, too often mistaken elements of the process of secularization for a programmatic secularism, resulting in a wholesale rejection of modernity.³³ Meanwhile, the “secular” itself, or “secularity,” simply “means finitude, that which is not godly.”³⁴ There is a basic distinction, but not a strict dualism, between what is god-natured and infinite, and that which is contingent, finite, and ultimately “not-god.” “Finitude” or contingency is “the defining characteristic of both human beings and the world.”³⁵ Schillebeeckx follows up on the existential-experiential dimensions of human finitude in the third volume of his *Jesus*-trilogy, *Church: The*

29. Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 230–31 [232–33].

30. Schillebeeckx, “Secularization and Christian Belief in God,” 34 [57–58].

31. Schillebeeckx, “Secularization and Christian Belief in God,” 34–35 [58–60].

32. See Lieven Boeve’s similar distinctions between secularization and secularism as well as individualization and individualism: Lieven Boeve, *God Interrupts History: Theology in a Time of Upheaval* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 13–29; Lieven Boeve, “Consumer Culture and Christian Faith in a Post-Secular Europe. Reflections on Individualisation, Critical Agency and Reflexivity,” *ET Bulletin* 17 (2006): 109–13.

33. Schillebeeckx, *I Am a Happy Theologian*, 43.

34. Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 231 [234].

35. Kennedy, “God and Creation,” 48.

Human Story of God (1989), where he describes the indirect, universal experience of contingency—the “absolute limit” which is mediated through human experiences of relative limits.³⁶ This “absolute limit” is what in fact constitutes humanity, separating us as individual beings from “others” in the world. It is “not a product, not a human projection, but a real fact” of existence, and which also compels us to interpret our own finite existence in relation to this limit.³⁷ It is precisely in our experience of this limit that we encounter God who is not, by nature, constrained by it. The limit presents us with something that is not produced or developed out of ourselves, but a divine transcendence—mediated immediacy—in and through human experience.³⁸ Therefore, God can be known through reflection on the experience of ontological human finitude that, albeit indirectly.

Being Finite and Being at all

Beings exist, and they could have also not existed, but the fact of their existence as distinct beings within created being also implies their independence from their source and absolute origin. Once in existence, creation moves in and for itself, with laws of causation and development that do not directly depend on God as an explanation for the “how” and “why” questions of history and nature. Such explanatory dependence actively would remove some of our humanity by making us merely “only a subcontractor of a predetermined divine blueprint.”³⁹ Schillebeeckx thereby rejects predestination entirely, in favor of an open history which is, for God and humanity, “an adventure.”⁴⁰ From this account of contingency, we have to understand that Schillebeeckx sees it as a feature of creation, and not as a flaw to be overcome. The principle of creation is that it is *itself* and it is *not* God, and therefore finitude acts as the foundation of the creative activity of creation, the precondition for it to be and become itself, and the beginning of humanity’s quest for salvation. The absolute limit thus represents the ontological possibilizing power of self-transcendence and creative freedom.⁴¹

By being finite, human beings, and all creatures, are thrown back on themselves in experience. The very fact of their finitude makes it possible to discern an inside–outside, self–other distinction, beginning and maintaining the process of self-differentiation and self-actualization.⁴² Schillebeeckx sees the human rejection or misinterpretation of finitude as the source of dualistic and emanationist heresies. Dualism interprets finitude as

36. Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 75–78 [77–80].

37. Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 76 [79].

38. Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 77–78 [79–80].

39. Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report*, 103 [117].

40. Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 89 [91].

41. See Daniel Minch, “Re-Examining Edward Schillebeeckx’s Anthropological Constants: An Ontological Perspective,” in *Salvation in the World: The Crossroads of Public Theology*, ed. Stephan van Erp, Christopher Cimorelli, and Christiane Alpers, T&T Clark Studies in Edward Schillebeeckx (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 113–30.

42. Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 77 [79].

a degradation from an initial perfection, which results in our experiences of pain, suffering, and death from which we must ultimately be delivered. This can occur through the restoration of a primordial state of perfection or the apocalyptic substitution of this world for a new one. Emanationism similarly sees finite beings as degradations of the transcendent God—lesser forms of the perfect, “divinity reduced in rank” in a necessary, hierarchical ordering.⁴³ Both of these are theological attempts to do away with the absolute limit. Counter to both of these options, Schillebeeckx argues that salvation does not consist in God saving us from our finitude or from the world. He believes finitude reveals to us God’s own divinely willed impotence or weakness—a weakness that actually safeguards our creaturely freedom and illustrates the nature of the divine gift.⁴⁴

The Secularization of Finitude

The deeply symbolic language that Christians have used about *creation from nothing* points to the fact that humanity and the world, “in and of themselves, hang in a vacuum, above absolute nothingness.”⁴⁵ This is the context in which we come to experience our own finitude: the absolute limit, or the mediated experience of our radical finitude in and through other relative experiences. How we fundamentally experience our finitude is essential for our understanding of nature and creation. We can reject finitude and all that it implies, either with full faith in human progress or narratives about economic or technological growth, or in a way that calls on God to intervene and remedy the situation—a rejection of human freedom in favor of access to divine infinitude. We can also accept finitude in a purely immanent frame: there is nothing “more” than the world, leading us either to despair or, as with many Marxist-inspired social movements, compelling us to change the concrete situation in which we live. Within both options, however, lies a more fundamental question about “what form of human life is sound and worthwhile.”⁴⁶ It invades all of our worldviews and turns them into narratives about the fittingness of the world in and for human beings. Even when these worldviews are mutually contradictory and flawed, they indicate something about the nature of our finitude: to be finite is to actively contemplate and strive for future completion. In modernity, this question, nearly universalized into a social concern, has led to an acceleration of the process of secularization, and the overall phenomena of social acceleration, whereby the perceived pace of life and the processes by which people live within society all continuously speed up.⁴⁷

There is a third understanding of the experience of finitude: the anxiety and the question about salvation inherent in the experience of finitude itself reveals something

43. Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report*, 98–99 [112].

44. Edward Schillebeeckx, “I Believe in God, Creator of Heaven and Earth,” in *God among Us: The Gospel Proclaimed*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 91–102.

45. Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report*, 100 [114].

46. Schillebeeckx, “I Believe in God, Creator of Heaven and Earth,” 100.

47. See Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*, trans. Jonathan Trejo-Mathys, *New Directions for Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 160–94.

about the nature of secularity. I have often wondered what Schillebeeckx meant in saying that, on the one hand, finitude is really “the definition of all secularity.” On the other hand, he states that, “Being-the-world, and therefore not-God, can never itself be secularized, for in that case the modern secularized world would have to find a means of doing away with the constitutive finitude of human beings and the world.”⁴⁸ So, “secularity” is by definition finitude and this constitutes our way of being-in-the-world, but this secularity can itself never be entirely secularized, which implies a process of rational control. In analyzing these two assertions, I conclude that if we could “secularize” (master, manipulate, exercise omniscient control) our own finitude, then we would in fact be doing away with finitude itself and thereby negate the entire possibility of being as such. Finite creation already is a creative dialectic between being and nothingness. To negate the nothing altogether, would in fact collapse being into absolute nothingness. Thus finitude, and by extension creation as a whole, points beyond itself toward the dynamic, absolute origin: the creator-God. The center of creation is to be found “outside” of itself.

Human Transcendence and Nature

In a dense, yet largely overlooked, section in *Church: The Human Story of God*, Schillebeeckx clarifies how he understands the relationship between humanity and nature within the larger reality of creation.⁴⁹ Schillebeeckx remains committed to a version of the Thomistic anthropocentric view, but unlike Aquinas, Schillebeeckx’s vision of the *eschaton* does not do away with plants, animals, and the movement of celestial bodies, which only exist now because they serve humanity’s material needs.⁵⁰ He does believe, however, that in order to act as the protectors of nature, humanity must both understand itself as a part of nature and as transcending it.⁵¹ Humanity possesses a “surplus” beyond other elements of nature: “a somatic-spiritual awareness, something transcendent, as a result of which [humans] can keep their relationship with God in mind.”⁵² Nature *qua* nature cannot *pray*, and human beings are a necessary part of creation because they occupy a position that is between God and the rest of nature. Humanity mediates the covenant between God and nature, and although creation celebrates the creator in its very being as itself, true conscious praise is something humanity performs and mediates to the rest of the natural world. “Thus,” Schillebeeckx says, “nature transcends itself in human beings, who are themselves part of nature.”⁵³

The transcendent and mediating position of humanity is not a license to unbridled mastery or manipulation, however. By being a part of nature, humanity transcends it,

48. Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 230–31 [233].

49. Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 232–43 [234–46].

50. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 3, q. 91, a. 2 & a. 5.

51. Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 236 [238].

52. Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 236 [238]; translation amended. See Edward Schillebeeckx, *Mensen als verhaal van God* (Baarn: Nelissen, 1989), 256.

53. Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 236 [239].

but this transcendence is not absolute. As we have seen above, absolute transcending would entail the negation of finitude, or total mastery over ourselves and the world, erasing the boundary between the finite and infinite and ultimately collapsing finite beings into nothing. Every human act is also an experience of the absolute limit as well as an act of transcending relative limits—becoming more than we were previously. Thus there is a hermeneutical movement between being and becoming in human subjectivity that is grounded in the facticity of nature. No amount of human manipulation will remove this limit. For Schillebeeckx, this tells us that more than just “co-humanity” is needed, but a “universal involvement” in creation that takes responsibility for the other’s well-being—and this otherness extends to the whole of the natural world.⁵⁴ As the image of God, humanity is no “static likeness.” It is like the creator, an image but also an original unto itself, and as such it is categorically different from the absolute original.⁵⁵ As a part of nature, humanity is both like other beings and categorically different by possessing the power of self-transcendence. I would argue that humanity acts as the *symbol* of God in and to creation. The philosopher William Desmond characterizes symbols as “broken wholes”—broken off from the original while also partaking in it. Such a symbol “is the image of this generous giving, already an image of community even in difference.”⁵⁶ For Schillebeeckx, this type of giving necessitates responsibly and a “universal involvement” in creation: “Human beings must protect nature and guard it against the chaos which human beings can make of it through misbehavior.”⁵⁷

We can also think of the symbolic nature of humanity as “broken wholes,” not exclusively in the sense of being “broken off” from God, but in being “broken open.” Being broken open suggests a whole where an opening is made, forcibly, for an excess and a capacity to receive more than what was originally given. Self-transcendence “breaks” the human being open both from the “inside,” in order to be able to go beyond itself, and to receive an excess from “outside.” As creatures, humans are secular, finite, and historical beings. As symbols, human beings are internally and externally split—both free and naturally determined; existing in-and-of-themselves and somehow dependent on an absolute origin that is beyond all finite attempts at its discovery. Therefore, human secularity truly is unable to be wholly secularized. This “brokenness” of humanity is not a flaw that has to be covered over, but the breaking open of a seal that allows us to be more than material nature and to strive toward God.

Creation Faith, Creaturely Freedom, and Integral Ecology

Although humanity transcends nature in some measure, Schillebeeckx does not see it as actually transcending *creation* as such. At this point I will shift to Pope Francis’s

54. Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 242 [244].

55. See William Desmond, *Being and the Between* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 213.

56. Desmond, *Being and the Between*, 217.

57. Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 242 [244].

2015 encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, to examine how it affirms Schillebeeckx's "creation faith," as well as where the two diverge. First, it is important that both Schillebeeckx and Francis characterize ancient Israel's experience of the exile as a formative event for Judeo-Christian eschatology—the hope for a salvific future was revealed over a long process of reflection on the faithfulness of God throughout ancient Israel's historical experience (see *LS* 72–75).⁵⁸ During the period of the Babylonian exile, the recognized content of God's "promise" to Israel shifted from the possession of the land to a realization of God's faithful abiding presence even through death. This brought about a new understanding of the history that prioritized the coming future over-against an idealized or mythological past. This corresponds with Schillebeeckx's emphasis on humanity's responsibility for nature and the human concept of the future as a project shaped in and through human action.⁵⁹ History is not predetermined, and we are constantly making decisions about the shape of the present, and by extension, the future. Creation is not a mythological "order," although this mythology can be reestablished when we falsely objectify nature.⁶⁰ Pope Francis likewise affirms that "Judeo-Christian thought demythologized nature. While continuing to admire its grandeur and immensity, it no longer saw nature as divine. In doing so, it emphasizes all the more our human responsibility for nature" (*LS* 78).

This affirmation from Francis of creation as "not-God" leads us to consider the nature of the "secular" as we have done above. In the encyclical, Francis clearly affirms,

We are not God. The earth was here before us and it has been given to us. This allows us to respond to the charge that Judeo-Christian thinking, on the basis of the Genesis account which grants man "dominion" over the earth (cf. *Gen* 1:28), has encouraged the unbridled exploitation of nature by painting him as domineering and destructive by nature. This is not a correct interpretation of the Bible as understood by the Church. (*LS* 67)

This supports Schillebeeckx's creation theology in two ways: first, the distinction between humanity and God is underlined; creatures are not-God, but they stand as the recipients of their being in a gift-relationship with the creator. Second, any readings of the creation narrative that endorse "tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures" represent a gross misinterpretation of the Bible and the doctrine of creation (*LS* 68; see also 82–83). Authentic secularity is affirmed, however, since the created world is one "in need of development" wherein God has limited Godself "in such a way that many of the things we think of as evils, dangers or sources of suffering, are in reality part of the pains of childbirth which [God] uses to draw us into the act of cooperation with the Creator" (*LS* 80). Human beings are not forbidden from changing present reality to make it "more human," or to remove sources of suffering imposed by

58. Edward Schillebeeckx, "The Interpretation of the Future," in *The Understanding of Faith: Interpretation and Criticism*, trans. N. D. Smith, Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx 5 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 4–11 [5–13].

59. Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 239–42 [241–45].

60. Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 237 [239].

the environment or by sociohistorical structures. In fact, in order to live up to the creative possibilities given to humanity as revealed in Jesus of Nazareth, we have a duty to change these structures for the well being of our fellow creatures and ourselves. There is a realized eschatological element intrinsically present in the humanization of the world which is empowered by the structure of creation itself. This can be read as legitimating not only the “secular” as such, but also secularization as a process, provided it is carried out in a humanizing manner. The choice for or against humanizing secularization is itself a challenge to humanity’s freedom.

Creaturely freedom is part of the givenness of creation, and this includes our responsibility for the future. Francis appropriately speaks of this responsibility in the language of the “common good,” and now that we understand the scope of our secular abilities, we are under a heavy obligation to act with what he calls “intergenerational solidarity” toward future generations, especially in how we deal with nature (*LS* 159). This is very clearly meant as a critique of contemporary economic structures, which are primarily focused on achieving short-term profits combined with the drive for technological mastery and objectification. In order to profit from increased rates of consumption in the short term, present forms of capitalism rapidly deplete natural resources and material capital in an unsustainable manner. Unlike natural, metabolic process, where waste products from one cycle serve as nourishment for other interconnected cycles, modern economic processes of material production and consumption will eventually exhaust the resources that fuel the system.⁶¹ In order to continue to produce short-term growth and consumption, economic powers have pushed for increased deregulation of industries and financial markets, allowing them to operate faster and with more flexibility in the present moment. This push for deregulation erodes the foundations of the modern welfare state in service of material gain, thus selling out the future security of the population in favor of high stock prices and executive bonuses today.⁶² We should see this economic mentality as being intrinsically intertwined with the current ecological crisis. We should also recognize that there is an inverted eschatological relationship within this paradigm. By beginning from creation as the free gift of God along with the free human responsibility for the future, we arrive at a realized eschatology, where our present action is oriented toward the coming salvific future. Economic logic, on the other hand, sacrifices the future in favor of the absolute primacy of present.

In order to develop the kind of “intergenerational solidarity” and a corresponding ecological worldview that Pope Francis calls for, we must also possess an “adequate anthropology” (*LS* 118). In 1989, Schillebeeckx saw quite clearly that “our picture of the world of human beings and animals is going wrong. The decisive question is; what image of human beings do you opt for?”⁶³ To answer this question, it is helpful to look at the distinction Pope Francis draws between nature and creation. He says, “In the

61. Philip Goodchild, *Theology of Money*, New Slant: Religion, Politics, Ontology (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 80–81.

62. See Rosa, *Social Acceleration*, 203–7.

63. Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 237 [240].

Judeo-Christian tradition, the word ‘creation’ has a broader meaning than ‘nature,’ for [creation] has to do with God’s loving plan in which every creature has its own value and significance” (LS 76). This gives us a framework in which we can come to a theological-anthropological image of humanity in relation to the relative transcendence of human beings over nature, but from within creation. The secularizing aspects of human history testify to such transcendence—humanity can rationally shape the natural world to fit its needs. This can be done in a responsible way (humanization), or in a purely instrumental way (hominization). By virtue of being “not-God” and constrained by the absolute limit, we are not granted complete mastery over history, time, or the whole of the cosmos. We are only granted a capacity for transcending through rational thought, action, and reflection on our present surroundings, our future, and our origins in both the historical and ontological sense.

I believe that this distinction between nature and creation allows us to meaningfully interpret humanity as a “symbol” of God, broken open through human and divine transcendence. First, humans transcend nature while being an integral part of it, but they do not transcend creation altogether. After all, this would imply the ability to categorically leave our finitude behind—the definitive secularization of all secularity. Second, creation is itself “open” because God does not create “once” at a specific event in the past, but is always engaged in the free activity of creation. The place of humanity within creation, and with reference to nature, must also be fundamentally open-ended in the sense that after the Christ-event all of humanity can be transfigured in both the divine image and likeness. Such a deification, or final salvation, is not salvation from finitude and the erasure of so many elements of the natural world (as Thomas Aquinas thought). Inclusion in the life of God preserves and correctly orders finite creation in the messianic *kairos*. Thinking of humanity as the “broken symbol” of the creator God intensifies our responsibility for creation—each and every element of it—even if perfect stewardship is beyond our grasp. It may also help us to experience creation differently, and occasionally to be unable to separate the experience of natural, finite things from the experience of God. This is not because the things themselves are God, but because God is intimately present in each moment of creation and we experience God in and through our historical, finite experiences—*mediated immediacy* (cf. LS 221).

Finally, however, there is an apparent difference in the role played by humanity in the otherwise corresponding creation theologies of Schillebeeckx and Pope Francis. For Schillebeeckx, nature does not “pray,” while Francis maintains that “by their very existence” each created thing gives glory to God (LS 33). The Psalms call on parts of nature to praise God (see Pss 104; 136; 148), and Francis of Assisi addressed inanimate objects by personal names and even preached to them (LS 11, 86–88). Schillebeeckx does not deny that nature praised God, but he interprets these types of examples as abstractions from a human perspective.⁶⁴ There is, therefore, a question whether or not the human somatic-spiritual awareness is in fact necessary for an authentic praise and worship of God in the fullest sense. Schillebeeckx emphasizes the

64. Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 236 [238–39].

uniqueness of humanity, the symbol of God's creation, even claiming that other creatures *need* humans and their unique capacity for self-transcendence.⁶⁵ Francis emphasizes the equal right of all creatures to exist, since all are given their being from God and none can be said to "possess" another in an absolute sense. For Francis, too much stress on the anthropocentric view has led to the many abuses that his encyclical warns of. There is a real theological difference here concerning how far "anthropocentrism" can be carried. I am inclined to side with Schillebeeckx and the transcendent uniqueness of humanity. Our self-transcendence gives rise to a "downward causation" that has transformative effects on all of creation, many of which have been quite terrible in terms of actual history. These include unjust social power structures, exploitative economic systems, and the ravaging of the environment for material gain.

On the other hand, Christ shows a different possibility for this kind of "downward causation" model of human transcendence. Jesus of Nazareth's life, death, and resurrection can be viewed as an argument for the uniqueness and salvific achievement of humanity: *concentrated creation*, creation as God wishes it to be; "God in a human way, and human in a divine way."⁶⁶ This also speaks to the salvific universality of Christ for all of creation, and not just for Christians. The Gospels identify Jesus with God's activity, and they characterize Jesus and God as having the same qualities including a kind of mastery over creation. In particular, the Gospel of Mark narratively identifies Jesus with God's creative activity in saying, "He has done all things well" (Mark 7:37).⁶⁷ Here the verb "to do/to make" (*poieō*), "all things" (*panta*), and "well/ good" (*kalos*) directly corresponds to God's declaration that all of the things (*panta*) which he had made (*poieō*) were good (*kalos*) in the Greek text of Genesis 1:31. Additionally, Jesus's "being with" (*meta eimi*) the "wild beasts" in the "wilderness" after having been tested by Satan indicates a non-antagonistic relationship (Mark 1:12–13), looking forward to the theme of the disciples being called to "be with" Jesus (*meta [lēsou] eimi*, 3:14; 4:36; 5:18).⁶⁸ Further, Jesus's ability to sit (Mark 4:1) and to walk on the sea (6:47–51; cf. Matt 14:22–33; John 6:15–21) mimics the activity of God's spirit over the sea in Genesis and God's mastery of the chaotic sea in Job (38:8–13; 40:25–32). In particular, his intention to "pass by" (*parerxomai*, Mark 6:48) the disciples mimics God "passing by" Moses (*parerxomai*, Exod 33:22 LXX) and use of part of God's name ("I am," *egō eimi*, Mark 6:50; Exod 3:14 LXX), giving us a rhetorical theophany by

65. Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 236 [238].

66. Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter of God*, 10 [14].

67. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 161 [184]. For an introduction to narrative and rhetorical characterization through the repetition of narrative frames and significant vocabulary, see Paul L. Danove, "Mark 1,1–15 as Introduction to Characterization," in *Greeks, Jews and Christians: Historical, Religious and Philological Studies in Honor of Jesús Peláez Del Rosal*, ed. Lautaro Roig Lanzillotta and Israel Muñoz Gallarte, Estudios de Filología Neotestamentaria 10 (Córdoba: El Almendro, 2013), 127–48.

68. Mark 3:13–6:6a is part of the larger "Galilee" section (1:16–8:26), which includes chiastic subsections: (A) "be called," 1:16–3:12; (B) "be with," 3:13–6:6a; (A') "be sent," 6:6b–8:26. See Paul L. Danove, *The End of Mark's Story: A Methodological Study*, Biblical Interpretation Series 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 138–41, 249.

presenting God's essential characteristics through Jesus.⁶⁹ The "Messianic secret" motif of Mark also shows that the other orders of creation know intuitively who Jesus is and obey him implicitly (Mark 1:23–25, 33–34; 3:11–12). Luke's Gospel also echoes this theme, but it does this by having the disciples loudly proclaim who Jesus is. The Lukan Jesus does not prevent them since even if he did, "the stones will cry out" (Luke 19:38–40). The orders of creation recognize and obey Jesus with the notable exception of human beings who variously frustrate, disappoint, betray, and finally murder him. In the presence of Jesus—the human being who is "God in a human way, and human in a divine way"—the natural world becomes harmonious, hospitable, and humanized because the rule of God is eschatologically made present.

Conclusion: Mediating Positions on an Anthropocentric World


I am aware that the emphasis on an anthropocentric creation may be precisely the kind of hubristic anthropological short-sightedness that Pope Francis wants to critique. It may be that acknowledging our relative insignificance is something that is simply too difficult for many of us to do openly. I think, however, that there is room to mediate the positions of Schillebeeckx and Francis, since, as we have seen, they already begin from the same essential foundation with their Thomistically conceived creation theologies. The way to do this is to approach the orientation of creation to the creator through the Incarnation. This allows us to preserve our image of humanity as the "symbol" of God's salvific activity, or Schillebeeckx's concept of the mediating uniqueness of human transcendence, while also keeping Francis's emphasis on the potential "prayerfulness" of creation. The Gospels identify different, nonhuman elements of creation as naturally responding to the salvific initiative of Jesus. God's eternal Word, who is the fullness of revelation of the Father, commands the obedience of all things. In Jesus of Nazareth, we see how this is performed in a godlike way: nonhuman creation responds to God's free initiative in a way that respects the autonomy of creation—it does not cease to be what it is as finite and made to be good. It is not abolished or converted into a foreign or purely "spiritual" reality.

The human response to Jesus is markedly more complicated, revealing the relative transcendence of humanity within nature along with the relative effects of human transcendence within the world. The effects of human actions are not confined merely to the human world, but have a ripple effect across nature. This is true for Jesus, a human person, who offers and effects salvation, but as a finite person he cannot forcibly overcome our rejection of his offer (Mark 1:45; 6:1–6). So does creation "pray"? The answer is yes, but not in response to God's transcendence as such. Rather it "prays" in response to the "making present" of God's transcendence in and through the creative activity of the Word throughout history. This is most fully visible in Jesus of Nazareth who through his being-human instantiates the Rule of God. This continues to apply to the activity of those who recognize the goodness of creation and treat it in a godly way.

69. See also John 8:24–25; 15:24; 18:5 for the power of God's name when Jesus uses it.

We can also see nature's prayerful activity in experiences of negativity and as a lament for the absence of salvation. Such a lament is still connected to the initiative of Jesus in whom the world sacramentally encounters its creator. The consequences of human transcendence of nature, both good and bad, are too strong to do away with a fundamentally anthropocentric view. My hope is that we can acknowledge our unique place within creation without neglecting the special responsibility that we have for its well-being that comes with this fundamental trust which God has given to us by our very being created. This will be a task for the church in the world, which must develop social and political practices consonant with this view of humanity and of creation. The challenge is to break down the pervasive economic view of humanity which undergirds our instrumental use of nature and abdication of human responsibility for the future in favor of the extraction of value in the present. "Secularization," in the manner that we have used it here, is in some ways the root of the problem because our ability to rationally plan the world and the future became too disconnected from its original theological impetus, giving over into an instrumental "hominization" of the world. But secularization as a process is not inherently problematic or sinful. It can and must be turned to a theologically oriented Christian secularity and authentic humanization of the world. This will require, most of all, a common vision of the future mediated through partial experiences of the Rule of God in the present. It is here, by providing that eschatological vision in a realized manner, that an active and socially engaged church as the people of God can become politically transformative.

ORCID iD

Daniel Minch  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5087-023X>

Author Biography

Daniel Minch is Assistant Professor of Dogmatic Theology at the University of Graz, and member of the Institute of Systematic Theology and Liturgical Studies at the Faculty of Catholic Theology. His research interests include the economic dimensions of contemporary political theology, eschatology, and theologies of hope. He is the author of *Eschatological Hermeneutics: The Theological Core of Experience and Our Hope for Salvation*, T&T Clark Studies in Edward Schillebeeckx (T&T Clark, 2018).