

A Trinitarian Basis for a “Theological Ecology” in Light of *Laudato Si’*

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Eugene R. Schlesinger

Milwaukee, WI, USA

Abstract

This article responds to Pope Francis’s call in *Laudato Si’* for an ecological expansion of mission and seeks to provide it with theological support. This support comes by way of a trinitarian rendition of the missiological concept *missio Dei*. Drawing from Thomas Aquinas and Bernard Lonergan’s accounts of the trinitarian missions, it articulates a theological ecology (as opposed to an ecological theology), in which the traditional doctrine of God is the controlling motif. Through the missions of the Son and Holy Spirit, God transforms the moral-intellectual-volitional comportment of humanity and recruits them into a shared mission of environmental concern.

Keywords

Thomas Aquinas, ecology, Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, Bernard Lonergan, *missio Dei*, Trinity

In his “programmatic” Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis called for a “pastoral and missionary conversion” of the church, signaling that mission lies at the heart of his pontifical agenda.¹ It is in this light that we should read

1. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (November 24, 2013), 25–33, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html (hereafter cited as *EG*). Francis notes the programmatic significance of this conversion in *EG* 25. See also the discussion in David Carter, “*Evangelii*

Corresponding author:

Eugene R. Schlesinger, Milwaukee, WI 53201, USA

Email: eugenschlesinger@gmail.com

his environmental encyclical letter, *Laudato Si'*.² The “ecological conversion” to which the pope calls us is an expression of the missionary conversion (*LS* 217–27). As Francis invites the church to a renewed focus on the ecological crisis in whose grip we all find ourselves, we must realize that this is not simply the provenance of ethical niceties, or even of self-preservation, but rather a matter of the church’s mission. As the conciliar decree on mission reminds us, “The pilgrim church is missionary by her very nature.”³ Hence, the call to an ecological expansion of ecclesial mission touches upon the *raison d’être*, and, indeed, simply *l’être* of the church.

Given the central importance of Francis’s call to ecological concern, we must proceed carefully and thoughtfully. The environmental crisis threatens to fundamentally alter the planet’s future. Moreover, by locating environmental concern within the purview of the church’s mission, particularly as he calls for a missional reconfiguration of the church, Francis opens the door for significant shifts in how we understand the Catholic Church. Slipshod appropriations of environmentalism and inadequately thought-out action plans could have far-reaching deleterious effects.⁴

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- Gaudium: Testimony of a Simple Believer, Teaching of a Great Church Leader,”* *One in Christ* 48 (2014): 54–68; Stephen Bevans, “The Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World: Implications and Prospects,” *International Review of Mission* 103 (2014): 297–308, <https://doi.org/10.1111/irom.12064>; Mari-Anna Auvinen-Pöntinen, “Missionary Discipleship as the Innovation of the Church in Pope Francis’ *Evangelii Gaudium*,” *International Review of Mission* 104 (2015): 302–13, <https://doi.org/10.1111/irom.12104>; Noel Connolly, “*Ad Gentes* to *Evangelii Gaudium*: Mission’s Move to the Centre,” *Australasian Catholic Record* 92 (2015): 387–402; Enzo Biemmi, “Une église ‘en sortie’: La conversion pastorale et catéchétique d’*Evangelii gaudium*,” *Lumen vitae* 70 (2015): 29–41; Markus Lubert, “*Missio inter gentes* und *Evangelii gaudium*: die Pragmatik des Apostolischen Schreibens und seine missionstheologischen Implikationen,” *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 98 (2014): 254–69; Laurent Ulrich, “Une église ‘en sortie’: Renoncer à certaines pratiques ou composer de nouvelles perspectives?” *Lumen vitae* 70 (2015): 55–61; Gilles Routhier, “Quel type d’institutionnalité pour l’église catholique? Le renouveau de la figure ecclésiale à la lumière de l’exhortation apostolique *Evangelii gaudium*,” *Lumen vitae* 70 (2015): 43–53; Etienne Grieu, “Évangéliser aux périphéries: Oui, mais que veut dire ‘périphérie’?” *Lumen vitae* 70 (2015): 79–84.
2. Francis, *Laudato Si'*: *On Care for Our Common Home* (May 24, 2015), http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html (hereafter cited as *LS*).
 3. *Ad Gentes* (December 7, 1965), 2, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_ad-gentes_en.html (hereafter cited as *AG*). Mission was a central category for the Second Vatican Council’s ecclesiology, beginning with *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (December 4, 1963), 9, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html. See especially *Lumen Gentium* (November 21, 1964), 1, 18–20, 31, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html (hereafter cited as *LG*).
 4. Cf. Neil Ormerod’s and Cristina Vanin’s concern that terms such as “ecological conversion” tend to be left undefined and that, “Faced with such a lack of precision, the danger

In what follows, I shall briefly review some salient points of *Laudato Si’*’s ecological expansion of mission, and then supplement this by an appeal the contemporary missiological principle of the *missio Dei*, which I develop through an appropriation of Thomas Aquinas’s and Bernard Lonergan’s trinitarian theologies.⁵ In this way, a solid theological and theoretical ballast is provided for our newly expanded account of the church’s mission. Because my aim is almost entirely positive—to lend support to Pope Francis’s environmental agenda—I shall focus upon this supplementation, rather than entering into polemical engagements with other approaches, or cataloguing their perceived missteps. There are, no doubt, other theoretical bases upon which one could build. I offer this one with the conviction that it provides solidity, and that it complements Francis’s own priorities.⁶

is that the term could become a cipher into which various contents,” not all of them adequate to the task, “can be filled.” See Ormerod and Vanin, “Ecological Conversion: What Does It Mean?” *Theological Studies* 77 (2016): 328–52 at 329, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040563916640694>. As we shall see below, a parallel problem exists with the concept of mission as *missio Dei*.

5. Hence, this article carries forward an ongoing conversation within *Theological Studies* on trinitarian theology, and especially Lonergan’s theology of the divine missions. E.g., Michel René Barnes, “Augustine in Contemporary Trinitarian Theology,” *Theological Studies* 56 (1995): 237–50, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056399505600202>; Christiaan Jacobs-Vandegeer, “The Unity of Salvation: Divine Missions, the Church, and World Religions,” *Theological Studies* 75 (2014): 260–83, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040563914529896>; Travis E. Ables, “The Word in Which All Things Are Spoken: Augustine, Anselm, and Bonaventure on Christology and the Metaphysics of Exemplarity,” *Theological Studies* 76 (2015): 280–97, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040563915574464>; Neil Ormerod, “For in Him the Whole Fullness of Deity Dwells Bodily: The Trinitarian Depths of the Incarnation,” *Theological Studies* 77 (2016): 803–22, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040563916666822>. See especially, Robert M. Doran, “The Starting Point of Systematic Theology,” *Theological Studies* 67 (2006): 750–76, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00405639060700402>, and the welter of responses it has generated: e.g., Neil Ormerod, “Two Points or Four?—Rahner and Lonergan on Trinity, Incarnation, Grace, and Beatific Vision,” *Theological Studies* 68 (2007): 661–73, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056390706800309>; Charles Hefling, “Quaestio Disputata: On the (Economic) Trinity: An Argument in Conversation with Robert Doran,” *Theological Studies* 68 (2007): 642–60, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056390706800308>; David Coffey, “Quaestio Disputata: Response to Neil Ormerod, and Beyond,” *Theological Studies* 68 (2007): 900–15, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056390706800407>; Doran, “Addressing the Four-Point Hypothesis,” *Theological Studies* 68 (2007): 674–82, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056390706800310>. When I address the Four-point hypothesis below (n42), I shall address the relationship between some of these articles.
6. As we shall see, Francis is particularly concerned with humanity’s transformation in an ecological conversion as the way to address the environmental crisis. Aquinas and Lonergan are both particularly focused upon the intellectual-spiritual-moral transformation of humanity, making them particularly suitable interlocutors. Moreover, towards the end of *Laudato Si’*, Francis articulates a trinitarian vision wherein the final destiny of all creation is incorporation into the subsistent relations that are the divine life (*LS* 238–40). Hence, my proposal seeks to carry forward and develop this trinitarian insight.

In this way, I hope to provide the foundations for a theological ecology (as opposed to an ecological theology). By a theological ecology, I intend something along the lines of what Hans Urs von Balthasar meant by a theological aesthetics, as opposed to an aesthetic theology. The latter refers to “a theology which...work[s] with the extra-theological categories of a worldly and philosophical aesthetics,” while the former “develops its theory of beauty from the data of revelation itself with genuinely theological methods.”⁷ Rather than work from climate data to theology, I take the reverse course, confident that proper thought and speech about nature’s creator will provide the needed position from which to work as we evaluate how to properly care for the creation. Hence, my preoccupation is with the theoretic upper blade of heuristic method, rather than with the concrete particulars of data on environmental science.⁸ I leave it to others with the proper competency and expertise to supply that needed lower blade. The doctrine of God must be our driving motivation and controlling concern, even as we turn to this most urgent of human crises.⁹ By reading Aquinas and Lonergan through the lens of *Laudato Si’* we are led to a conviction that the salvation of humanity involves the total human environment, and that, in a significant sense, our salvation depends upon, and is for the sake of, the environment.

See further Denis Edwards, “‘Everything Is Interconnected’: The Trinity and the Natural World in *Laudato Si’*,” *Australasian Catholic Record* 94 (2017): 81–92; Edwards, “Earth as God’s Creation: The Theology of the Natural World in Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si’*,” *Phronema* 31, no. 2 (2016): 1–16; and Edwards, “‘Sublime Communion’: The Theology of the Natural World in *Laudato Si’*,” *Theological Studies* 77 (2016): 377–91, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040563916635119>, for brief treatments of Francis’s trinitarian reflections; Christopher J. Thompson, “*Laudato Si’* and the Rise of Green Thomism,” *Nova et Vetera* 14 (2016): 745–56, <https://doi.org/10.1353/nov.2016.0049>, for an articulation of how Francis’s agenda in *Laudato Si’* is deeply resonant with the Thomistic heritage. Note, though, that Thompson’s appeal to Aquinas tends to be limited to a rearticulation of natural law, while I am focused specifically on Aquinas’s explanation of trinitarian doctrine. Finally, note Ormerod and Vanin’s account of ecological conversion within the terms of the four types of conversion (religious, intellectual, moral, and psychic) identified by Bernard Lonergan and Robert Doran: Ormerod and Vanin, “Ecological Conversion,” 328–52. Hence, there are significant lines of continuity between Francis and my other interlocutors.

7. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 1, *Seeing the Form*, ed. Joseph Fessio and John Riches, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1982), 117.
8. E.g., Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, *Collected Works* 3 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 337–38.
9. To evoke Lonergan again, it strikes me that to bypass this crucial theological task in the light of the urgency of the environmental crisis would be an instance of general bias, which eschews the hard work of theory in favor of common sense solutions. See, e.g., Lonergan, *Insight*, 250–69; Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 52–55.

Laudato Si’^s Ecological Vision

It would be superfluous to review all the particulars of *Laudato Si’*’s ecological vision in this context. For our purposes, the most relevant datum is already given in the recognition of the encyclical’s subject matter: Francis is urging us to attend to the ecological dimensions of the church’s mission. Nevertheless, three salient features of Francis’s ecological agenda are worth noting at this point, for they shall serve as foci of continuity in what follows, allowing me to offer my proposed theological ecology in the service of advancing Francis’s agenda, for it complements him on these points especially.

First, true to his Latin American roots, Francis notes that “ecojustice” is tied to human justice. The environmental crisis disproportionately affects the poor and vulnerable of the world. Insofar as the church is tasked with working for an integral human development, the natural environment must also be cared for. Indeed, the earth is the common home of humanity, meaning that for human persons to flourish, so too must the eco-system(s) of which we are an integral part. Francis goes so far, though, as to note that the earth itself is the victim of injustice. Among the poor and vulnerable on whose behalf the church exercises a preferential option, the earth, our common mother and sister, must be included (*LS* 2, 43–52, 156–62).

Second, a complex dialectic between humanity and the rest of creation must be observed and maintained. On the one hand, an improper anthropocentrism has caused untold harm, as human beings misunderstand their unique status within the created order, and appeal to it as justification for exploitative relationships with the earth’s resources. In contrast, humanity is not other than the creation. The Genesis creation story roots us in the dust of the earth: the same as all other creatures (*Gen* 2:7, 19). A fundamental equality pervades our relationship to the plants and animals of the earth, on whom we depend and to whom we are responsible.¹⁰ On the other hand, though, there is an ineffaceable and unique human dignity that must not be dispensed with. Humanity, rather than any other creature, is created in the image of God.¹¹

Finally, and related to this dialectic of humanity, the solution to the ecological crisis must be a human one. This is the case at a couple of levels. First, all the evidence indicates that climate change and other aspects of the ecological crisis are the result of human activity (*LS* 101–36). Because this is the case, it can only be through a change in human activity that this crisis can be addressed and, by the grace of God, corrected. Second, because the environmental and human crises are intertwined, it follows that in

10. *LS* 66–69. Edwards notes a similar dynamic, but roots it in a recognition of the intrinsic worth of all creatures. Edwards, “Everything Is Interconnected,” 83–84; Edwards, “Earth as God’s Creation,” 4–8; Edwards, “Sublime Communion,” 380–83. This is a valid and important perspective, which Francis also clearly holds. My pursuit of equality in terms of this dialectic provides a foundation for my subsequent discussion of sublation and the healing and creating vectors.

11. *LS* 90. See further Cardinal Reinhard Marx, “‘Everything Is Connected’: One the Relevance of an Integral Understanding of Reality in *Laudato Si’*,” *Theological Studies* 77 (2016): 295–307, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040563916635116>.

order to properly address the needs of the environment we must address the needs of fellow human beings, and vice versa (*LS* 137–62). From this, it follows that a transformation of humanity is a *sine qua non* of the church's environmental mission. We do not aim to merely change our behavior, though of course we do that; rather, the values, dispositions, and orientations of human beings, from which our behavior flows, must be transformed.¹²

Ecological Mission and the *Missio Dei*

As I noted above, Francis's call for ecological conversion is properly understood as an aspect of the missionary conversion to which he has already called the Catholic Church. Hence, it is particularly appropriate that we articulate our theological ecology with reference to mission theology, which will allow us to deepen our understanding of the foregoing elements of Francis's environmental invitation. Without a doubt, the single most influential concept in contemporary mission theology is the idea of mission as the *missio Dei* or mission of God. This concept emerged explicitly in the 1950s, most prominently at the International Mission Conference meeting at Willingen, Germany in 1952.¹³ However, such a God-grounded understanding of mission is also

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12. See, e.g., Francis's call for an "ecological conversion" (*LS* 226–31), as well as his recognition that many responses, such as the call for population control, simply skirt the true issues of human injustice and refusal to make the concrete changes required by the crisis (*LS* 50). See further Marx, "Everything Is Connected," 305–6.
13. For the statements and documents issued at Willingen, see Norman Goodall, ed., *Missions Under the Cross: Addresses Delivered at the Enlarged Meeting of the Committee of the International Missionary Council at Willingen, in Germany, 1952; with Statements Issued by the Meeting* (London: Edinburgh House, 1953). On *missio Dei* more broadly, see Wilhelm Andersen, *Towards a Theology of Mission: A Study of the Encounter between the Missionary Enterprise and the Church and Its Theology*, trans. Stephen Neill (London: SCM, 1955); Georg F. Vicedom, *Missio Dei: Einführung in eine Theologie der Mission* (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1960); L. A. Hoedemaker, "The People of God and the Ends of the Earth," in *Missiology: An Ecumenical Introduction; Texts and Contexts of Global Christianity*, ed. F. J. Verstraeten et al., trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 157–71; Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004), 286–304; Francis Anekwe Oborji, *Concepts of Mission: The Evolution of Contemporary Missiology* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2006), 134–49; Wilhelm Richebächer, "'Missio Dei'—Kopernikanische Wende oder Irrweg der Missionstheologie?" *Zeitschrift für Mission* 29 (2003): 143–62; James A. Scherer, "Church, Kingdom, and *Missio Dei*: Lutheran and Orthodox Correctives to Recent Ecumenical Mission Theology," in *The Good News of the Kingdom: Mission Theology for the Third Millennium*, ed. Charles Van Engen, Dean S. Gilliland, and Paul Pierson (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993), 82–88; Thomas Kemper, "The *Missio Dei* in Contemporary Context," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 38 (2014): 188–90, <https://doi.org/10.1177/239693931403800407>. For the most comprehensive account of the history of *missio Dei* theology see John G. Flett, *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth, and the Nature of Christian Community* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

evident in the conciliar documents, especially *Lumen Gentium* and *Ad Gentes* (LG 2–4; AG 2–5). At its heart, the concept of mission as *missio Dei* is meant to highlight that mission is first of all and fundamentally a divine activity, rather than a human one. We are recruited into and invited to participate in God’s mission, but our place in that mission is not at the center.¹⁴

Already, then, an important resource is provided for our ecological concern. First, humanity is decentered, meaning that we must look not just to our own desires and machinations in terms of our priorities. Instead, the Creator’s agenda is the center of our concerns, and this Creator has not made an isolated humanity, but placed us within a vast whole, all of which he values. Hence, we must also look to the needs of the nonhuman creation. Now, as I mentioned above, at its best, the biblical tradition has always affirmed this, but it bears noting that anthropocentrism of perspective and anthropomorphism of concern have wrought havoc upon the earth.

Second, though, and crucially, it decenters us in the sense of preventing hubris in our ecological concern and action. This is perhaps less immediately obvious in its import, but must be stressed. Ecological concern is currently a progressive *cause célèbre*. Award shows celebrate their “going green,” and Hollywood elites wax prophetic on behalf of the environment. In such circumstances the temptation towards self-aggrandizing, self-righteousness, and virtue signaling is rampant.¹⁵ The last thing we need is a Pelagian approach to the environment or a savior complex for humanity. Instead, we recognize that all of our good is derivative of and dependent upon divine grace and action.

Nevertheless, there are significant fault lines in *missio Dei* theology. The Barthian theologian John Flett has exposed the fact that *missio Dei* lends itself to procrustean contortions, ready to be trotted out for whatever pet ideologies the person appealing to it happens to be loyal to. Lacking any particular content, *missio Dei* is little more than a slogan and a placeholder.¹⁶ It means anything and everything, and, therefore nothing,

14. Andersen, *Towards a Theology of Mission*, 47–48; Vicedom, *Missio Dei*, 12–15; David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004), 390–91; Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 288–91; Flett, *Witness of God*, 7, 38.

15. Indeed, when one considers that the way in which celebrities “go green” is to purchase carbon credits to offset the impact of private jets and the like, rather than by making substantive changes to their lifestyle, it becomes clear that something far short of the ecological conversion to which Pope Francis calls us is in view.

16. Flett, *Witness of God*, 5, 76–77. Note the further judgments such as Scherer’s that “in the decade of the 1960s, *Missio Dei* was to become the plaything of armchair theologians with little more than an academic interest in the practical mission of the church but with a considerable penchant for theological speculation and mischief making.” Scherer, “Church, Kingdom, *Missio Dei*,” 85. Hoedemaker suggests that “All in all, the harvest has been poor. The formula *missio Dei* marks a transition toward a new discussion, toward an attempt to bring mission and church together in a new theological connection. But it is too open in all directions to be fruitful . . . I have come to the conclusion that the term *missio Dei*, which has usually been pivotal in the discussions that have happened, does not really help us.”

but is rather a quasi-Feuerbachian screen upon which idiosyncratic proclivities are projected. This can just as easily happen in the arena of environmentalism. Once more we are struck by the importance of developing a theological ecology, rather than an ecological theology. Only thus can we avoid the ideological captivity of Christian doctrine as we attend to this urgent reality.

Missio Dei and the Divine Missions

In considering the *missio Dei* or mission of God, we must be fundamentally concerned with the missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit into the economy. The classical distinction between *theologia*, God's life *qua* God, and *oikonomia*, God's interaction with the non-divine reality which he has created, is the *locus classicus* for considering "mission" as it relates to the life of God. Within the Western theological tradition, at least, this has involved pursuing the relationship between the eternal processions of the Son and Spirit, which constitute the life of God, and their missions.¹⁷ In this section, I interrogate two heirs of that tradition to see how they can help in our quest for a theological ecology.

Hoedemaker, "The People of God and the Ends of the Earth," 165, 171. Philip L. Wickeri suggests that the phrase has run its course and should be abandoned; Wickeri, "The End of *Missio Dei*—Secularization, Religions and the Theology of Mission," in *Mission Revisited: Between Mission History and Intercultural Theology; In Honour of Pieter N. Holtrop*, ed. Volker Küster (Berlin: LIT, 2010), 39–43. Bevans and Schroeder note the liabilities that attend the *missio Dei* concept, but still view it as the "most promising of the contemporary models of mission." Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 303–4.

17. I will develop this with reference to Thomas Aquinas and Bernard Lonergan below. See also, e.g., Augustine, *On the Trinity* 4.19.21. For an account of the continuity between Augustine, Aquinas, and Lonergan, see Jeremy D. Wilkins, "Why Two Divine Missions? Development in Augustine, Aquinas, and Lonergan," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 77 (2012): 37–66, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021140011427225>. I find Wilkins's account more persuasive when it comes to Aquinas and Lonergan than Augustine. For a more historically attuned reading of Augustine's account of the divine missions, see Lewis Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 177–98; Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, vol. 3, *The Dramatis Personae: The Person in Christ*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992); This perspective is also evident in Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, vol. 4, *The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1994); Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic*, vol. 2, *Truth of God*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004). Though the more commonplace language of the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity is in vogue, I follow Giles Emery in preferring the language of processions and missions, as this lends itself less toward the misunderstanding that two "Trinities" are in view. Gilles Emery, "'Theologia' and 'Dispensatio': The Centrality of the Divine Missions in St. Thomas's Trinitarian Theology," *Thomist* 74 (2010): 515–61, <https://doi.org/10.1353/tho.2010.0033>. See also the slightly earlier contribution by Bruce D. Marshall, in which he levies this criticism of immanent/economic language, and also notes that it renders the unity of God *qua* God incoherent. Marshall, "The Unity of the Triune God: Reviving an Ancient Question," *Thomist* 74 (2010): 1–32, <https://doi.org/10.1353/tho.2010.0000>.

Thomas Aquinas

In Question 43 of the *Prima pars* of his *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas Aquinas develops his position on the divine missions, noting that, with regard to the infinite divine persons of the Son and Holy Spirit, “sending” cannot be understood in terms of local motion, which is a category error with regard to God, but rather implies (1) a relation to the “sender”, and (2) a new mode of being with the terminus of the mission. The former, Aquinas identifies with the only real relations that pertain with regard to God, the relations of origin, or processions. The latter is a bit more complicated. This new mode of being in the terminus is not a being present where the divine person had previously been absent, nor can it be a change in that divine person, who as infinite and simple pure act, is not subject to change. It is, rather, an effect produced in the creature to which the divine person is sent.¹⁸

From all of this it follows that a divine mission implies a relation of origin, which is eternal, and some effect in a creature, which is temporal. It further follows that the only change involved is a change in the creature. The missions, then, are the processions, only directed externally toward creatures, rather than remaining internal to the Godhead.¹⁹ Thomas further specifies that the effect produced in the creaturely term of the divine mission can only be understood as sanctifying grace, by which creatures are rendered capable of attaining God. The divine missions are that grace by which God gives Godself to creatures so as to dwell in and with them.²⁰

Because “it belongs to both the Son and the Holy Spirit to dwell in someone through grace and to proceed from another, it belongs to both of them to be sent on mission,” whereas, while the Father dwells in persons, he does not proceed from anyone, and, so, is not sent on mission.²¹ This distinction helps to clarify precisely the meaning of “mission” when predicated of God. The effect alone is not the mission (else the Father would be said to be sent on mission), but the effect as a new term for the relation of origin for the divine person in question.²²

Thus far, we have focused upon the so-called “invisible missions” of the Son and Holy Spirit, by which they, so to speak, renovate humanity so that human creatures may come to share in and enjoy the life of God.²³ Yet the preeminent sense in which

18. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1, q. 43, a. 1.

19. Aquinas, *ST* 1, q. 43, a. 2. See also the discussion in Wilkins, “Why Two Divine Missions?” 48–50; Gilles Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Francesca Aran Murphy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 364–69. Emery speaks of both the relation of origin and the external term as constitutive of the mission. Lonergan, however, contends that only the relation of origin is constitutive of the mission, while the external term is a consequent condition (see below). On this matter, I follow Lonergan.

20. Aquinas, *ST* 1, q. 43, a. 3. See Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 369–70; Wilkins, “Why Two Divine Missions?” 53–54.

21. Aquinas, *ST* 1, q. 43, a. 5. trans. Alfred J. Freddoso, <http://www3.nd.edu/~afreddos/summa-translation/TOC.htm>. This principle is also discussed in article 4, which asks whether the Father is sent on mission.

22. Aquinas, *ST* 1, q. 43, a. 5.

23. See the discussion in Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 373–87.

we speak of God's mission must be and remains the Son's incarnation, his visible mission. In this connection, Thomas specifies that the visible mission is the assumption of human nature by the Son.²⁴ The effect in the creature here is that it comes to subsist in the eternal divine person of the Son. Of course, it is in this assumed humanity that Christ undertakes the work of redemption by the paschal mystery of his life, death, and resurrection. The Holy Spirit also has a visible mission, appearing in creatures such as fire or the dove who descended at Christ's baptism. The visible mission of the Holy Spirit, though, is different in kind than that of the Son, for the Son assumes the nature of a rational creature, whereas the Spirit simply manifests himself in the flames or feathers.²⁵

Bernard Lonergan

From Aquinas we derive the most basic position on the trinitarian missions. Further enlightening development of this theologoumenon is supplied by Bernard Lonergan in the systematic portion of his *The Triune God*.²⁶ What Lonergan particularly contributes to our considerations is an account of contingent predication. God, being the one necessary reality, eternally existing as sheer actuality, would seem to be exempt from contingent statements, which, by definition are not necessary, and by implication involve potentiality. Nevertheless, there are statements we need to make about God that are contingent, rather than necessary.²⁷ Among these are: God is the creator of the universe, and God is the redeemer of humanity. Neither of these statements is necessary: God could have not created or not redeemed. And yet, they are both true.

In such instances, Lonergan's approach is to understand that "What is truly predicated contingently of the divine persons is constituted by the divine perfection itself, but it has a consequent condition in an appropriate external term."²⁸ Such statements are constituted by the divine perfection because, as statements about God, they are dependent upon God, whose being is infinite. Hence, it follows that nothing can be added to the divine being by such a statement or any of its terms, for infinity cannot be supplemented. For this reason, its constitution is in God. Nevertheless, its term must be external to God (i.e., a creature), for as a contingent statement, it is not necessary, whereas God is necessary, and a fully realized actuality.²⁹

24. Aquinas, *ST* 1, q. 43, a. 7. See also Wilkins, "Why Two Divine Missions?" 51.

25. Aquinas, *ST* 1, q. 43, a. 7.

26. Bernard Lonergan, *The Triune God: Systematics*, trans. Michael G. Shields, ed. Robert M. Doran and H. Daniel Monsour, Collected Works 12 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007). See also Wilkins, "Why Two Divine Missions?" 55–64, for a characterization of Lonergan's thought as a development and transposition of Aquinas's.

27. Lonergan develops this account in *Triune God: Systematics*, 439–47. See the further discussion in Robert M. Doran, *The Trinity in History*, vol. 1, *Missions and Processions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 41–57.

28. Lonergan, *Triune God: Systematics*, 439.

29. Lonergan, *Triune God: Systematics*, 441.

It is along these lines that Lonergan will develop his account of the divine missions, but before addressing that account, we should take a moment to underscore the import of this approach to contingent predication. It rigorously asserts the non-necessity of the world (both in general and to God), making it clear that God's being is not bound up with the world's, nor does God gain anything from the world's existence. Despite facile affirmations of divine suffering, or ecotheological gestures toward pantheism, this distinction is essential to uphold.³⁰

Morally, it avoids granting necessity to the world's suffering and degradation. Particularly as we face the environmental crisis, this is of crucial importance. Nature red in tooth and claw is not the deepest reality of being,³¹ nor is deforestation, fracking, loss of polar ice, and so on. We must avoid covering such realities with a pall of necessity, and contingent predication helps us to do so. Metaphysically, suffering's condition of possibility is found in our finitude, our creation out of nothing,³² not the being of God. If God's being is bound up with the world's, then God becomes morally reprehensible, bound up as he is with the suffering of the world, which is no longer merely a consequence of created finitude, but of divine self-actualization.³³ Moreover, were this the case, the ecological crisis would not only threaten our planet, but God himself. And, indeed, for God to intervene in the crisis would be a mere matter of self-preservation, rather than an act of gratuitous love. God would simply be a narcissist.³⁴ Any ecotheology must avoid such perils, which, again shows the importance of a theological ecology rather than a mere ecological theology.

Turning to the divine missions themselves, Lonergan's position is that "The mission of a divine person is constituted by a divine relation of origin in such a way that it still demands an appropriate external term as a consequent condition."³⁵ Here,

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30. See Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 1–26, for an extensive survey on the question of divine passibility. For ecotheological elisions of God and creation see, e.g., Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993); McFague, *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008); Ivone Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999).
31. See Sarah Coakley's intriguing suggestion that a Thomistic account of divine providence, set within a trinitarian, incarnational, and passional framework, coupled with the phenomenon of evolutionary cooperation, represents a "modification" of "nature-red-in-tooth-and-claw." Coakley, "Evolution, Cooperation, and Divine Providence," in *Evolution, Games, and God*, ed. Sarah Coakley and M. A. Nowak (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 375–85 at 382–83.
32. Augustine, *The Nature of the Good*, in *The Manichean Debate*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, trans. Roland J. Teske, *The Works of Saint Augustine 1* (Hyde Park: New City, 2006), 325–48.
33. Perhaps no one has argued this more clearly and forcefully than David Bentley Hart in *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 157–66.
34. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?*, 160–61. See further Weinandy's arguments that predicating suffering of God renders the Christian doctrine of God (most especially the subsistent relations that the Trinity is) incoherent (120–27), and an account of God's redemption of the world highly dubious if not impossible (154–57).
35. Lonergan, *Triune God: Systematics*, 455.

Loneragan has essentially reaffirmed the Thomistic theolegoumenon, but within the idiom of his account of contingent predication. The missions of the Son and Spirit are their processions, but with a creaturely term. As with Aquinas, Lonergan sees the invisible missions of the Son and Holy Spirit as pertaining mainly to sanctifying grace, and the visible mission of the Son as pertaining to the assumed humanity. His account is a bit more differentiated, though. He identifies four created terms for the missions, and each term is an external term to one of the four real relations, which *are* the divine being (though conceptually distinct from it). Hence:

There are four real divine relations, really identical with the divine substance, and therefore there are four very special modes that ground the external imitation of the divine substance. Next, there are four absolutely supernatural realities, which are never found uninformed, namely, the secondary act of existence of the incarnation, sanctifying grace, the habit of charity, and the light of glory. It would not be inappropriate, therefore, to say that the secondary act of existence of the incarnation is a created participation of paternity, and so has a special relation to the Son; that sanctifying grace is a participation of active spiration, and so has a special relation to the Holy Spirit; that the habit of charity is a participation of passive spiration, and so has a special relation to the Father and the Son; and that the light of glory is a participation of sonship, and so in a most perfect way brings the children of adoption back to the Father.³⁶

This densely packed paragraph, containing what has been dubbed the Four-point hypothesis, provides a crucial window into Lonergan's account of the divine missions, and especially of their end.³⁷ Namely, the divine missions are the divine life

36. Lonergan, *Triune God: Systematics*, 471, 473.

37. Robert Doran has proposed using this Four-point hypothesis as the starting point of a "unified field structure" for systematic theology: e.g., Doran, "The Starting Point of Systematic Theology"; Doran, *Trinity in History*. Generally speaking, this proposal has met with positive evaluation, such as Neil Ormerod's suggestion that it represents a significant advance over Rahner's "two-point" hypothesis with its tendencies toward a Christology of degree: Ormerod, "Two Points or Four?" However, see Charles Hefling's demurral from the proposal, which he attributes to a *hapax legomenon* in Lonergan's thought and an unsatisfactory differentiation between sanctifying grace and habitual charity (he denies the distinction): Hefling, "On the (Economic) Trinity." Doran has expressed appreciation for Hefling's criticisms, and used them to refine his position, though he sees continued relevance in the distinction between sanctifying grace and habitual charity, and disputes the claim that the Four-point hypothesis is a *hapax legomenon* as it appeared also in Lonergan's *Divinarum personarum conceptionem analogicam evolvit B. Lonergan* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1957, 1959); see Doran, "Addressing the Four-Point Hypothesis." I would add that it also appears in Lonergan's 1951–1952 course on sanctifying grace: Lonergan, "Supplementary Notes on Sanctifying Grace," in *Early Latin Theology*, ed. Robert M. Doran and H. Daniel Monsour, trans. Michael G. Shields, *Collected Works* 19 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 562–665. Monsour also detects it in the sanctifying grace course: Monsour, "Bernard Lonergan's Early Formulation of the Foundational *Nexus Mysteriorum* in God's Self Communication in Creation," in *Meaning*

directed outwardly, and with the telos of bringing humanity into that same divine life.³⁸

A hallmark of both of these theologies of the divine missions is that they are focused upon the moral-spiritual-intellectual transformation of human beings. Graced humanity is brought into friendship with God, and repositioned among earthly realities.³⁹ Hence our comportment to God and to the world is repositioned. Returning to *Laudato Si’*, and our particularly ecological concerns, Francis’s call in the encyclical shows us that environmental action needs to be among our graced priorities. This of course does not rule out collaboration with persons of good will (who may themselves be acting in grace, even without specifically thematizing that experience).⁴⁰

The Transformation of Humanity and the Problem of Anthropocentrism

Loneragan’s and Aquinas’s vision of the soteriological end of the divine missions, and especially their emphasis on the transformation of humanity, may seem to reduce our concerns to a mere anthropocentric affair. However, this would be a misconstrual of the position, for a transformation of humanity is necessarily also a transformation of humanity’s total environment.⁴¹ This coheres with the ancient principle that humanity

and History in Systematic Theology: Essays in Honor of Robert M. Doran, ed. John D. Dadosky (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2009), 375–404 at 375–76.

38. As Lonergan himself writes, “There exists a created communication of the divine nature, which is a created, proportionate, and remote principle whereby there are operations in creatures through which they attain God as he is in himself.” Lonergan, “The Supernatural Order,” in *Early Latin Theology*, ed. Robert M. Doran and H. Daniel Monsour, trans. Michael G. Shields, Collected Works 19 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 52–255 at 65; See further the judgments of Hefling, “On the (Economic) Trinity,” 657; J. Michael Stebbins, *The Divine Initiative: Grace, World-Order, and Human Freedom in the Early Writings of Bernard Lonergan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 292; Monsour, “*Nexus Mysteriorum*,” 394–402; Wilkins, “Why Two Divine Missions?” 60.
39. Note Wilkins’s judgment that friendship is central to Lonergan’s account of the divine missions and their bestowal of grace. Wilkins, “Why Two Divine Missions?” 59.
40. Aquinas argues that all who participate in grace are the recipients of an invisible mission, though he does not explicitly state that such missions may find their term outside the bounds of explicit Christian profession. Aquinas, *ST*, 1, q. 43, a. 6. However, as *Gaudium et Spes* stresses, the Incarnation has bound Christ in some way with every human being, and in a mysterious manner, known only to God, all people are given the opportunity to share in grace. *Gaudium et Spes* (December 7, 1965), 22, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html. See Lonergan’s discussion in *Method in Theology* 108–9, 112–15. See further Robert Doran’s expansion of Lonergan’s thought on the invisible missions, particularly in terms of his proposed category of social grace: Doran, *Trinity in History*, 87–107.
41. See also Ormerod’s and Vanin’s attention to the question of anthropocentrism within a Lonerganian account of conversion. Ormerod and Vanin, “Ecological Conversion,” 349–51.

is a microcosm, which I intend to update. Two features of Lonergan's thought help to clarify what is at stake here. These are the notion of the good of order and the relationship between the creative and healing vectors.

In *The Triune God*, Lonergan distinguishes between the good of order and the good of act. In the case of God *qua* God, these two goods are identical: conceptually, but not really distinct. The good of act refers to the single, simple, and infinite act of being that God is, while the good of order refers to the ordered relationships among the triune hypostases. Because the real relations in God are identical to the divine nature, it follows that the good of order and the good of act are also identical.⁴²

With regard to the divine missions, the good of act refers to the actual sanctification and salvation of humanity through the missions of the Son and Holy Spirit, while the good of order refers not to "particular goods," but rather "certain concrete, dynamic, and ordered totalities of desirable objects, of desiring subjects, of operations, and of results."⁴³ It is within a good of order that particular goods are able to occur and recur in a stable, dependable manner. In order for humanity (we embodied and rational beings) to flourish and share in the divine life, we need a habitable world in which to live. The salvation of humanity necessarily implies a salvation of humanity's environment, as particular goods require a good of order.

At this point, we may still seem to be operating within a problematically anthropocentric perspective: the nonhuman creation should be cared for insofar as human needs demand this. Once more, though, I contend that this is a misconstrual, and here I turn more explicitly to the principle of humanity as microcosm. According to Lonergan, we are the sublation of nonrational creation, directed upwards toward God:⁴⁴ from a scientific perspective, we can understand this in terms of the culmination of a process of evolution.⁴⁵ From a theological perspective, we note that, in addition to being the outcome of evolutionary process, we are directed by this process's outcome (our rationality) towards God.⁴⁶

In Lonergan's thought, sublation involves the uniting of an underlying manifold of what would otherwise be coincidental events into a higher, systematized order (similar to how the otherwise coincidental events ignored by physicists are the data of chemistry, how the coincidental events ignored by the chemist are the data of biology, and so forth).⁴⁷ This upward vector of energy does not do away with the integrities of the

42. Lonergan, *Triune God: Systematics*, 421–34. Lonergan develops the position that the divine relations are identical to the divine essence on 257–61.

43. Lonergan, *Triune God: Systematics*, 491–93 at 493. See also Lonergan's earlier development of the notion of the good of order in *Insight*, 238–39, 619–20, 628–29; as well as his more mature articulation in *Method in Theology*, 48–52. Wilkins provides an excellent summary of the position on the good of order in "Why Two Divine Missions?" 61–63.

44. See Lonergan's version of this in *Insight*, 492–93.

45. See Lonergan's account of emergent probability in *Insight*, 284–92.

46. Note, e.g., the way in which the account of humanity's creation in Genesis 2 presumes a common origin with the animals (from the dust of the earth) and a unique directedness toward God. See also Francis's development of this theme in *LS* 65–66.

47. Lonergan, *Insight*, 230, 281, 289–91, 492–94.

lower levels, but rather preserves and elevates them. So the transformation of humanity is necessarily the transformation and preservation of the nonhuman creation. We are an integral component of the cosmic order, and our salvation is necessarily also the salvation of this totality.

For as we have seen, Lonergan conceives of salvation as a higher integration subsuming the human rational consciousness, which is already itself a sublation of the nonrational creation.⁴⁸ And because such sublations do not abrogate, but rather preserve the lower manifolds which they integrate, it follows that the salvation of humanity also requires the preservation of the created order itself. As human beings are recruited into collaboration with God through the missions of the Son and Holy Spirit, our comportment towards ourselves and the rest of the universe is reoriented. We are directed away from folly, shortsightedness, and destructive behaviors (whether destructive of ourselves, others, or our nonhuman others), and towards attentiveness, intelligence, reasonableness, and responsibility.⁴⁹

The enactment of these transcendental precepts—“Be attentive, Be intelligent, Be reasonable, Be responsible”—takes the concrete form of commitment to an integral scale of values.⁵⁰ These values include “vital, social, cultural, personal, and religious

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48. In his explicitly theological writings this is expressed as the supernatural order, which itself is the concrete instance of the divine missions. See Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, *Collected Works 1* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988); Lonergan, *Triune God: Systematics*, 471–73, 479–91, 497, 517; Lonergan, “The Supernatural Order”; Lonergan, “Supplementary Notes on Sanctifying Grace”; Lonergan, “God’s Knowledge and Will,” in *Early Latin Theology*, ed. Robert M. Doran and H. Daniel Monsour, trans. Michael G. Shields, *Collected Works 19* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 257–411. Note that by the writing of *Method in Theology*, Lonergan had transposed the notion of sanctifying grace into the idiom of a dynamic state of being in love with God; *Method in Theology*, 106–7. See further the excellent discussion in Monsour, “*Nexus Mysteriorum*”; Stebbins, *Divine Initiative*. In the philosophical *Insight*, which derives its categories from the data of human consciousness, rather than any revealed data, Lonergan simply notes that the divine solution to the problem of evil must be some sort of higher integration, which involves the transformation and elevation of human intelligence, but leaves unspecified its precise material content because this would require more than the heuristic structure available to natural human self-reflection: *Insight*, 718–25, 740–50.
49. Lonergan specifies these four “transcendental precepts” in *Method in Theology*, 20. While these precepts may, at first glance, appear insufficiently theological or to pertain too much to the order of nature, rather than being supernatural realities, which require divine grace, recall that within the metaphysics outlined in *Insight*, where “basic sin” represents a surd within the intelligible universe of proportionate being (689–92), and where the divinely initiated solution to the problem of evil develops in continuity with the existing order of the universe, and “consist[s] in the introduction of new conjugate forms in man’s intellect, will, and sensitivity” (718), this criticism is ameliorated. My specification of the relation between the creative and healing vectors below will provide further clarity.
50. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 20 (for the transcendental precepts), 31–33 (for the scale of values). See further Ormerod and Vanin, “Ecological Conversion,” 336–44, for an account of the scale of values and ecological concern within the framework of moral conversion.

values in an ascending order.”⁵¹ The various levels of this scale of values are a set of mutually conditioning relationships. The lower levels are presupposed by the higher ones, but the higher values are required for the proper functioning of the lower. For instance, the romantic stereotype of the starving artist notwithstanding, one cannot devote oneself to the cultivation of the beautiful in the fine arts (a cultural good) if one lacks the vital values of food and shelter. Conversely, though, a problem that arises at the level of vital values cannot be resolved at that level. Instead, vital values depend upon social values for their recurrence, while social values depend upon cultural values for their formation and enactment, and cultural values derive from the personal values of women and men of integrity. At the top of the scale, and conditioning the whole, are religious values. From being in love with God,⁵² persons are led to work for the integral functioning of the lower levels.

In the scale of values, we once more see the principle of sublation at work, as the lower levels are preserved by and within the functioning of the higher levels. What we also see, though, is that in addition to this upward trajectory of sublation, there is a downward trajectory, as the lower levels depend upon the higher for their proper functioning. In *Insight*, this upward striving of “finality” is at first unspecified in its directedness—an open-ended process that unfolds flexibly and probabilistically.⁵³ Later, though, with the introduction of transcendental knowledge into the schema, Lonergan revises the notion of finality such that God provides the direction for its order. What, from the perspective of proportionate being, seems open-ended and nonsystematic, is actually comprehended in its totality by the unrestricted act of understanding that is God.⁵⁴ It is from above, then, that finality receives its *telos*.

In the essay “Healing and Creating in History,” Lonergan further explores this motion from above to below. The upward, creative vector must be complemented by the downward healing vector, and vice versa. “For just as the creative process, when unaccompanied by healing, is distorted and corrupted by bias, so too the healing process, when unaccompanied by creating is a soul without a body ... for a single development has two vectors, one from below upwards, creating, the other from above downwards, healing.”⁵⁵

The healing of creation is not simply the result of the upward striving of and from the lower levels, but is rather the result of divine grace, a grace that does not abolish,

51. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 31. See especially, though, the significant development of the scale of values in the work of Robert Doran: e.g., Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 93–114; Doran, *Trinity in History*, 85–107.

52. This love, though, may not be explicitly thematized. Even so, it depends upon and derives from God (see above, n45).

53. Lonergan, *Insight*, 470–76.

54. Lonergan, *Insight*, 688–89.

55. Bernard J. F. Lonergan, “Healing and Creating in History,” in *A Third Collection: Papers*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe (New York: Paulist, 1985), 107–8. See also the extensive development of this theme in Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History*, 31–33, 174–76, 221–28, 242–53.

but rather supposes and perfects nature. The perspective we have developed here allows us to see that this Thomistic maxim refers not only to human nature, but also to “nature” in its more commonsense understanding, for humanity is the rational sublation of the upward striving creative vector, and the focal point of the downwardly transforming healing vector. In saving humanity God saves not just humanity, but the good creation of which he established humanity as the crown. For the movement of the healing vector does not terminate upon impact, but rather proceeds downward through the lower levels which are presupposed and sublated by the human creature.

It follows, then, that far from a problematically anthropocentric ecological commitment, according to which the environment is saved for humanity’s sake, Lonergan’s position on the divine missions gives us almost the inverse: humanity is saved for the environment’s sake. This parallels the insight of *missio Dei* theology that salvation is also a recruitment into participation in God’s mission. We are saved in order to join in this mission.

Conclusion

And so, through these fairly abstruse theoretical reflections, we are led more or less to where we began: to a renewal of ecological concern. By taking this path, though, we have developed a theological underpinning for Francis’s ecological expansion of mission, which coheres with its most basic commitments, and makes explicit the connection between clarion call by *Laudato Si’* toward environmental action and *Evangelii Gaudium*’s invitation to a pastoral and missionary conversion for the church. The concept of *missio Dei* helpfully decenters humanity, attenuating the sort of anthropocentrism that has led to the environmental crisis, and foregrounds the centrality of divine action in our redemption and the redemption of the world.

At the same time, by articulating our conception of *missio Dei* within the parameters of classical trinitarian theology, we not only avoid some of the metaphysical conundrums which beleaguer certain strands of ecotheology; we also forcefully reassert the responsibility humanity has toward the earth, for the divine missions aim at and result in the transformation of humanity. It is through the graced action of transformed humanity that the crisis of environmental degradation will be addressed. For it is through the graced action of the Son’s assumed humanity, and the gracious sanctification of the Holy Spirit, that God has reached out to embrace and redeem the entire created order, beginning with humanity.

Author Biography

Eugene R. Schlesinger (PhD, Marquette University) specializes in contemporary systematic theology with an emphasis on the intersection of sacramental theology and ecclesiology. His first book, *Missa Est! A Missional Liturgical Ecclesiology*, was published by Fortress (2017).