

“Each Creature, Resplendently Transfigured”: Development of Teaching in *Laudato Si’*

Theological Studies
2018, Vol. 79(2) 376–398
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DOI: 10.1177/0040563918766690
journals.sagepub.com/home/tsj



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Abstract

Three stages can be traced in the Catholic Church’s magisterial teaching on the status of nonhuman creatures in the eschatological New Creation. In this article I ask three questions: *which*, *why*, and *how*: *Which* creatures are in the new creation, *why* are they part of the New Creation, and *how* will they be there? I argue that *Laudato Si’* gives a new magisterial answer to these three questions and constitutes an important new development in the teaching on New Creation.

Keywords

animals, Thomas Aquinas, eschatology, Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, New Creation, nonhuman creation, Teilhard de Chardin, Vatican II

Pope Francis’s 2015 encyclical letter *Laudato Si’* represents a significant updating of the Catholic Church’s teaching on the eschatology of specific nonhuman creatures and on their place in the New Creation. For the purposes of this article, this updating represents the third important phase in the Catholic Church’s teaching on nonhuman creatures in the New Creation. The first stage, from the time of the early church until Vatican II, is the church’s teaching on the human body as exclusively that which experiences resurrection in the New Creation. The second stage refers to the teaching of Vatican II on the eschatological transformation of creation. The third stage

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constitutes the teachings of *Laudato Si'* on specific creatures introduced into the New Creation. I will ask three questions of each stage: *Which* creatures are in the New Creation? *Why* are they part of the new creation? *How* do they come to be there?

In asking these three questions, part of what I will show is the dramatic methodological shift that took place in Vatican II and that continues to be employed by *Laudato Si'*. Painting with broad strokes, the answers of the Catholic Church's magisterium in the first stage are primarily directed at philosophical and theological concerns—at “theological criteriology” (the truth of theory), in the language of Clodovis Boff.¹ The eschatological answers of Vatican II and *Laudato Si'*, on the other hand, are directed primarily (though not exclusively) at “pistic criteriology” (the truth of praxis).² The result of the latter more existential approach is to engage socio-analytic tools of mediation with the intention of bringing to light the questions of the world at large. In his opening address to the council, Pope John XXIII called for the church to read the “signs of the times.”³ These signs are often negative, pointing to painful questions at the heart of human society and the nonhuman environment. New questions, passed through a hermeneutical mediation with the theological sources of Scripture and tradition, result in a development of the church's teaching.

The implicit and explicit employment of this methodology has resulted in profoundly new developments in the magisterial teaching on nonhuman cosmic eschatology. The first stage of the church's theology of New Creation extends the resurrection specifically to human flesh as an early response of the church to gnosticism. In this stage, there is no magisterial teaching about the resurrection of the non-material world. Outside of magisterial texts, speculation that allowed for nonhuman creatures *directly* created by God to participate in the New Creation in particular ways *only* related to human beatitude. The second stage, inaugurated by Vatican II, refers to the transformation of all creation. However, the texts of Vatican II remain unclear as to *which* creatures participate in this transformation, and the vision remains primarily anthropocentric. The third stage introduced by Pope Francis in his encyclical letter *Laudato Si'* moves well beyond the previous two stages. First, *all* creatures are specifically identified, by virtue of the incarnation and resurrection, as having their own particular end in God. Second, this end is not directly related to human beatitude but is specifically identified as belonging to each creature apart from its relationship to humanity. I take *Laudato Si'* to be an important new development in the teaching on New Creation, and I argue here

1. Clodovis Boff, *Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundations*, trans. Robert Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987), 198, cited in Peter C. Phan, “Method in Liberation Theologies,” *Theological Studies* 61 (2000): 40–63 at 59, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056390006100103>.
2. Phan, “Method in Liberation Theologies,” 59. As Giuseppe Alberigo points out, “the Council took over John XXIII's directive that no new definitions should be formulated.” The council was to have a fundamentally pastoral orientation. Giuseppe Alberigo, “Transition to a New Age,” in *History of Vatican II*, vol. 5, *The Council and the Transition: The Fourth Period and the End of the Council; September 1965–December 1965*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006), 573–652 at 579.
3. John XXIII, *Humanae Salutis* (December 25, 1961), <https://jakomonchak.files.wordpress.com/2011/12/humanae-salutis.pdf> (hereafter cited as HS).

that *Laudato Si*⁴ represents a significant development in the church's eschatological teaching, which results from its employment of Vatican II's method of reading the signs of the times in the light of the theological sources of Scripture and tradition.

Stage One: The Resurrection of the Flesh (50–1961 CE)

The resurrection of the body is affirmed in all of the earliest creeds and *regulae fidei* as a concrete response to the dualizing tendencies of gnosticism. Gnostic eschatology considered the body, like the rest of the material cosmos, as a prison. Valentinian gnostics held that “when the souls of the righteous reach their final place of rest, ‘the fire which lies hidden in the world will blaze forth and burn’ until all matter, and the fire itself, is destroyed.”⁵ The ancient form of the apostolic creed, found both in the East and the West, shares the affirmation of the resurrection of the body,⁶ what Joseph Ratzinger calls that “central star in the firmament of Christian confession,”⁷ in opposition to this dualistic worldview. The sources for this creed go back as early as Justin Martyr (167 CE). The Western form of the creed uses the language of the resurrection of the *flesh* in continuity with the church's Jewish heritage.⁸ The creeds of the Council of Toledo (400 and 447 CE: “A resurrection of the human flesh,” *DS* 20), and the “Faith of Damasus” (ca. 500 CE: “We are to be raised up by him on the last day in this body with which we now live,” *DS* 16) continue the same affirmation. Likewise, statements of the Roman pontiffs and councils consistently transmitted this central belief. The Council of Constantinople (381 CE) affirms belief in “the resurrection of the dead” (*DS* 86). The Symbol of Faith of Pope St. Leo IX echoes the “Faith of Damasus” by proclaiming “a true resurrection of this body, which now I bear, in eternal life” (*DS* 347). Here we find a clear denunciation of the Valentinian gospel of Philip: “The one who is risen is indeed not ‘naked.’ However, he no longer bears his own flesh, but the

4. Francis, *Laudato Si* (May 24, 2015), http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html (hereafter cited as *LS*).

5. Brian E. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 26.

6. Heinrich Joseph Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, trans. Roy J. Deferrari (St. Louis: Herder, 1957), *DS* 2 (hereafter cited as *DS*).

7. Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 134.

8. “It has been shown that what we have here is a continuation of the Jewish terminology of the resurrection, which by means of the venerable formula ‘all flesh’ denoted mankind as a whole.” Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 134. Unfortunately, Ratzinger fails to note here that the Jewish terminology frequently refers to *all creation* as a whole, and not just to humanity. The Hebrew word/s “all/flesh” (*kol bāšār*) “was used not only of people, but also of animals.” See for example, Gen 6:17; 9:11, 15ff.; Ps 136:25; and Sir 40:8, which refer to “‘all living creatures,’ including people and animals,” and Genesis 6:19; 7:15f., 21; 8:17; and Sir 13:16; 17:4, which refer to “‘all animals,’ the entire animal world.” See *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 2:318–19.

9. Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 173.

flesh of Christ.”⁹ Lateran IV (1215 CE), Lyons II (1274 CE), and the edict of Pope Benedict XII *Benedictus Deus* (1336 CE) reaffirm this as a central doctrine. Toledo XI (675 CE) is particularly adamant that the resurrected body is not a spiritual body with no relation to the body that lived on earth: “Neither do we believe that we shall rise in an ethereal or any other body (as some madly say) but in that in which we live and exist and move” (*DS* 287).

Only a brief summary of the *which*, *why*, and *how* of such a long period of time can be offered. *Which* creatures are resurrected? The human body or flesh alone is resurrected, without any mention of nonhuman creatures. Any other mention of nonhuman creatures in the New Creation can only be found in speculative theology. Also strikingly lacking is mention of scriptural texts dealing with questions of the New Creation in magisterial documents. Indeed, the language of “new creation” is not even once found in Denzinger as far as I can tell. The entire emphasis in the doctrinal tradition is on the human body, or flesh, and on its resurrection. *Why* the flesh is resurrected is related to the church’s early battles with gnosticism. *How* this resurrection takes place is through a “true resurrection of this body, which now I bear.”

Stage Two: Vatican II and the Transformation of Creation (1965–2015)

The transition from an almost entirely *individual* anthropocentric interest on the part of the church’s magisterium to a more cosmic vision began in its first phase at Vatican II. This first more “cosmic” moment was still primarily directed at human beings, as the church became increasingly aware of the social aspect of humanity, and developed a theology that transitioned from frequently focusing on the individual to focusing on the church as a whole and various ways in which others are related to the church. But the process of reading the signs of the times inaugurated by Vatican II employs a hermeneutical method. As such, it slowly but deliberately expanded to include nonhuman creation in its scope. I will first describe the hermeneutical method of reading the signs of the times that Pope John XXIII put into motion and then show how this method was embraced by Pope Francis and extended to all creatures.

In his Apostolic Constitution convening the Second Vatican Council, *Humanae Salutis*, Pope John XXIII called the council as a result of his reading of the signs of the times. Christophe Potworowski notes that in *Pacem in Terris* (1963), the signs of the time are primarily a positive reading of the “manifestation of Christian values at work within the very movements of history.”¹⁰ But *Humanae Salutis* begins on a very different note, with “painful considerations” about a “crisis underway in society” (*HS*). Pope John “reveals himself,” points out Joseph A.

10. Christophe Potworowski, *Contemplation and Incarnation: The Theology of Marie-Dominique Chenu* (Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001), 169.

Komonchak, “to have been very aware of the mixed blessings of modernity.”¹¹ Pope John was no naïf. He describes the great technological progress of the age “without a corresponding advance in the moral sphere.” Using a method containing a “primary reference to history”¹² he points to the deeper meaning of these historical events in the light of the Gospel. Pope John boldly read the negative signs of the times, aware that the “incarnation is therefore always in the form of redemption.”¹³ As Marie-Dominique Chenu put it, “every incarnation takes place by and in a liberation from evil, a redemption.”¹⁴

Pope John’s method (and that of Pope Francis) is very similar to that of many strands of liberation theology as described by Peter C. Phan. Liberation theology, according to Phan, employs three forms of mediation.¹⁵ The first stage of liberation methodology is analytical mediation, employing socio-analytic tools in order to clarify the “reality” of the situation. Second, liberation methodology employs the “hermeneutical circle” in order to correlate the insights it has gleaned through socio-analytic mediation to the sources of Scripture and tradition, to read these insights in the light of the Gospel. As Potworowski explains, “Signs of the times are thus located in the intersection of the two orders: construction of the world within creation [always an ambiguous process] and messianic economy within a liberating incarnation [requiring careful discernment].”¹⁶ The result of this second mediation is to come to a “third generality.” An example of this could be that “liberation is salvation.”¹⁷ Finally, liberation methodology employs a practical mediation in which “pistic truth” (existential, practical truth) and “theological truth” (theoretical truth) are placed in constant dialectical interaction, preventing methodological ossification from taking place. Especially important is recognizing that “anything whatsoever can be theology’s first generality.”¹⁸ But especially helpful are the “third generalities” of the social sciences or the natural sciences that can become “first generalities” for theology by means of their critical reflection upon reality.

There is a clear parallel to this threefold method both in *Humanae Salutis* and also implicitly throughout the council. As I will show in my analysis of the eschatological passages of *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*, the Council Fathers

11. Joseph A. Komonchak, “The Struggle for the Council during the Preparation of Vatican II (1960–1962),” in *History of Vatican II*, vol. 1, *Announcing and Preparing Vatican Council II: Toward a New Era in Catholicism*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995), 167–356 at 168.

12. Potworowski, *Contemplation and Incarnation*, 169.

13. Potworowski, *Contemplation and Incarnation*, 180.

14. Marie-Dominique Chenu, “Un Concile a la dimension du monde” (1965), in *Parole 2*, 635, quoted in Potworowski, *Contemplation and Incarnation*, 180. Emphasis added by Potworowski.

15. Phan, “Method,” 42.

16. Potworowski, *Contemplation and Incarnation*, 175.

17. Phan, “Method,” 54.

18. Phan, “Method,” 53.

often take as their starting point intuitions rather than dogmas.¹⁹ Their method is to look at the needs of the world, see these as signs confronting the church, read them in the light of the Gospel, and then offer a response. The whole structuring of the eschatological doctrine of Vatican II, as Candido Pozo argues, is to show that “the eschatological doctrine [of the church] contains and offers a response to the acute questioning of the men of our time.”²⁰ As we will see, this is precisely the root of Pope Francis’s new eschatological development in *Laudato Si’*. In light of the ecological crisis, there is a great need to clarify the eschatological destiny of nonhuman creation. The methodology remains clear: negative signs, read in the light of the Gospel, giving rise to new theological development. Pope Francis begins with “third generalities” mediated by the social and natural sciences, and employs them as “first generalities” of theology. The questions of *why*, *how* and *which* are no longer answered only through the mediation of Thomistic philosophical parameters, but now primarily through socio-analytic analyses of the signs of the times. The influential background presence of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin will lend further credibility to this interpretation. His constant engagement with the questions raised by the natural sciences as central to his theological method makes him an important cipher for the eschatological texts of Vatican II and *Laudato Si’*.

In his concluding chapter of the multivolume *History of Vatican II*, Giuseppe Alberigo makes the claim, “Placing Vatican II in its historical context makes it possible to see that it has its own place in the conciliar tradition. The elements of continuity with that tradition are considerable, but the elements of novelty are also and perhaps more important.”²¹ What I will show in this section is that while the elements of continuity with the church’s eschatological teaching (especially with the theological

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19. Alberigo notes the methodological shift at the council from the “deductive method” of previous councils to “recourse to the inductive method.” Alberigo, “Transition to a New Age,” 609.
20. Candido Pozo, *Theology of the Beyond*, trans. Mark A. Pilon (New York: St. Paul’s, 2009), 480. Pozo was responsible, according to Peter C. Phan, for heading up the preparation of the International Theological Commission, *Some Current Questions on Eschatology* (1992), http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_1990_problemi-attuali-escatologia_en.html. See Peter C. Phan, “Contemporary Context and Issues in Eschatology,” *Theological Studies* 55 (1994): 507–36 at 507, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056399405500304>.
21. Alberigo, “Transition to a New Age,” 644. Massimo Faggioli highlights the split between *ressourcement* and *incipit* views on Vatican II between *Concilium* and *Communio*: Massimo Faggioli, *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning* (New York: Paulist, 2012), 52. Was it a time primarily of looking back to the sources or was it a new beginning of reform within the church? Clearly the council was both, and *LS* bears out this interpretation, both building upon the *ressourcement* work of the council but also developing its eschatological teaching within the spaces opened up by the conciliar event. I will continue to use the language of “development” in this article since Pope Francis has shown a preference for this language previously by citing St. Vincent of Lerins in his interview “A Big Heart Open to God.” He quotes, “The doctrine of the Christian religion should follow the law of progress, so that

speculations of Aquinas) are many, there is a greater *aggiornamento* that takes place (drawing upon Scripture and patristic sources). The result was not so much the creation of *novelty* as it was the creation of a setting for further *development* for subsequent generations. In this sense Hermann Pottmeyer is correct to interpret Vatican II as the “building site” upon which *LS* could construct its rich eschatological edifice.²² I will redeem this claim as we move through several texts.

Lumen Gentium

The Third Session of Vatican II opened on September 14, 1964, with debates about the treatment of eschatology in chapter 7 of *Lumen Gentium*. Cardinal Larraona, Prefect for the Congregation for Rites, at his own request, had prepared chapter 7 in advance.²³ Cardinal Ruffini immediately questioned the “significance of the scriptural passages quoted”²⁴ and demanded “that the dogmas of hell and purgatory should be strongly emphasized.”²⁵ Four more speakers went on to elaborate on this same point until Archbishop Hermaniuk, the Ukrainian metropolitan of Winnipeg, reminded those present that “the true significance of the Chapter was to give the church a sense of expectancy, of vigilance, of preparation for death which was right around the corner for everybody, and of the end of time which stared the modern world in the face.”²⁶ In other words, Archbishop Hermaniuk reminded the Council Fathers of the methodological concerns of Pope John XXIII in *Humanae Salutis*.

The emphasis on the church itself rather than on the individual as the subject of the eschatological future was an emendation from what had been the previous goal of chapter 7. The previous title of the preparatory *schema* had read,

it may be consolidated by years, developed by time and made more sublime by age.” The pope continues in the interview: “St. Vincent of Lerins makes a comparison between the biological development of man and the transmission from one era to another of the deposit of faith, which grows and is strengthened with time.” Francis, “A Big Heart Open to God,” interview by Antonio Spadaro, *America*, September 20, 2013, <http://americamagazine.org/pope-interview>. St. Vincent of Lerins is also cited in *LS* n98, “Ut annis scilicet consolidetur, dilatetur tempore, sublimetur aetate.” This particular line seems to be a favorite of Francis, seeing as he quotes it both here in *LS* as well as in a previous interview as Archbishop of Buenos Aires, and in a video message to a conference in Argentina. See Jorge Mario Bergoglio, “What I Would Have Said at the Consistory,” interview by Sefania Falasca, *30Days*, November 2007, http://www.30giorni.it/articoli_id_16457_13.htm; Francis, address to International Congress of Theology (September 3, 2015), <https://zenit.org/articles/pope-s-video-message-to-theology-conference-in-argentina/>.

22. Cited in Massimo, *Vatican II*, 124.

23. Gérard Philips, “History of the Constitution,” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), 1:105–37 at 132.

24. Xavier Rynne, *Vatican Council II* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968), 294. “Xavier Rynne” was the pseudonym of Fr. Francis X. Murphy who attended Vatican II as a journalist.

25. Philips, “History,” 133.

26. Philips, “History,” 133.

“The Eschatological Nature of Our Calling and Our Union with the Heavenly Church,” and the topic was initially meant to focus on the veneration of the saints.²⁷ Actually, the subject of chapter 7 was initially not sanctioned at all, and it took an intervention by John XXIII to put the topic of the church’s veneration of the saints on the table.²⁸ The initial, more individualistic title was changed to “The Eschatological Nature of the Pilgrim Church and Her Union with the Heavenly Church.” The subject of eschatological transformation was moved from the individual to the body of Christ. The resurrection of the body was relocated into the mystery of the church as the “sacrament ... of the unity of the whole human race.”²⁹ The church is a sacrament, possessing an earthly element that bears the seal of the future transformation, a transformation that early on in article 9 refers to the liberation of “all creation” in Christ, quoting from Romans 8:21. Its end is the “kingdom of God” (*LG* 9) rather than the individual.

The rationale for the inclusion of the “cosmic aspect” of eschatology into chapter 7 can be traced to the discussion that surrounded the *textus prior*. One of the principle observations—made possibly by Monsignor Elchinger, at that time the coadjutor Bishop of Strasbourg³⁰—incorporated by the *relatio* was a request for a fuller treatment of eschatology “in order that those things which are rightly adduced from the eschatological nature of our vocation more under the individual, ascetical, and spiritual aspect, are completed in an explanation which more fully dwells on that aspect of its reality which is *collective, ecclesial, and cosmic*.”³¹ Pozo makes frequent mention of the importance of this request to the *textus emendatus*.³² As a result of this concern, Congar set to work on a draft that would emphasize more the “cosmic and historical aspects of Christian eschatology.”³³ The primary locus of a “cosmic eschatology” is article 48.

27. Otto Semmelroth, “The Eschatological Nature of the Pilgrim Church and her Union with the Heavenly Church,” trans. Richard Strachan, in Vorgrimler, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, 1:280–84 at 281.

28. Semmelroth, “The Eschatological Nature,” 280.

29. *Lumen Gentium* (November 21, 1964), 1, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html (hereafter cited as *LG*).

30. Pozo, *Theology*, 106n164. Komonchak notes that this intervention was urged by Yves Congar. See Joseph A. Komonchak, “Toward an Ecclesiology of Communion,” in *History of Vatican II*, vol. 4, *Church as Communion, Third Period and Intersession; September 1964–September 1965*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2003), 1–93 at 50n163.

31. Pozo, *Theology*, 106n164. “[U]t ea quae de indole eschatologica vocationis nostrae magis sub aspectu individuali, ascetico, spirituali recte proferuntur, compleantur expositione quae amplius insistat in eiusdem realitatis aspectu *collectivo, ecclesiastico, cosmico*.” Translation mine.

32. Pozo, *Theology*, 498nn42–43.

33. Komonchak, “Toward an Ecclesiology,” 51.

Lumen Gentium 48

Article 48 bears most directly in *Lumen Gentium* on the question of the resurrection of nonhuman creation. The text reads,

The Church, to which we are all called in Christ Jesus, and in which we acquire sanctity through the grace of God, will attain its full perfection only in the glory of heaven, when there will come the time of the restoration of all things (Acts 3:31). At that time the human race as well as the entire world, which is intimately related to man and attains to its end through him, will be perfectly reestablished in Christ (Eph 1:10; Col 1:20; 2 Pet 3:10–13). (LG 48)

As Pozo explains, this text refuses to settle a debate between incarnationists and eschatologists.³⁴ In that sense, it is a committee document, a text of “compromise” so important all throughout the products of Vatican II.³⁵ Pope John XXIII was clear that questions of dogmatic change should be sidelined throughout the council. As he says clearly in his opening address *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*, “The salient point of this Council is not ... a discussion of one article or another of the fundamental doctrine of the Church ... For this a Council was not necessary.”³⁶ For this doctrinal development, the council opened the way for *Laudato Si’*.

Before examining the limitations of text, however, it is important to notice the significant progress that it makes in light of what has been previously discussed. First, as has already been noted, it is the church, rather than the individual, who is to attain “full perfection” in heaven. It is the incarnate Christ, and his body the church, which is the goal of perfected and transformed reality. In view of this profound assertion, it can be noted that the subordinate clause—“which is intimately related to man and attains to its end through him”—is itself subordinated to Christ. Christ is the man to whom the universe is most intimately related and in whom it achieves its end. Raúl Gabás comments nicely on the movement of article 48:

1) The material universe converges toward man, in whom it reaches its own meaning. 2) The human race has its center of convergence in the *person* of Christ. 3) In Christ, God and man, is realized the perfect unity of all of reality. 4) Creation is on the way towards its goal. Man, and with him the entire universe, awaits a radical transformation.³⁷

34. Pozo, *Theology*, 98. Pozo quotes from G. Frosini in formulating the debate: “What does its consummation, i.e., the Kingdom, receive from man’s contribution? Specifically, do human and secular action contribute to the consummation of the Kingdom, and if so, in what way?” G. Frosini, *Teologia delle realta terrestri*, 19.

35. Alberigo, “Transition to a New Age,” 628. “The present *History* has gradually provided evidence of the recurring compromises in the development of the texts. Indeed, compromise was required for obtaining a broad consensus bordering on unanimity ... Close attention ought to be paid to the importance of these compromises, which weakened the conceptual and programmatic force of some pages of Vatican II and, in the postconciliar period, provided the basis for recurring and barren debates.”

36. Quoted in Alberigo, “Transition to a New Age,” 592.

37. Raúl Gabás, “Índole Escatologica de la Iglesia Peregrinante y Su Union Con La Iglesia Celestial,” in *Comentarios a la constitución Lumen gentium sobre la Iglesia*, ed. Casimiro

The movement is from the universe, to man, to Christ, in whom is realized the goal of all of reality. The clear biblical vision of creation existing in a hierarchy of solidarity is subsumed into the hypostatic union. It is toward him and in him that “the smallest particles of the universe” (las partículas mas pequeñas del universo) are taken up in the “embrace of the hypostatic union” (el abrazo de la unión hypostática).³⁸ As Juan Alfaro explains about this same article 48, there is both “gradation and subordination: the absolute primacy belongs to the resurrection of Christ; then comes the resurrection of the dead, as participation in the glory of the risen Jesus; and finally, the whole creation shares the glory of the ‘children of God.’ (Rom. 8:17, 21–23).”³⁹ The ascending movement of creation passes through humanity to the glory of the resurrected Christ.

Second, it should not pass unnoticed that the only references made in this text are to passages from Scripture. The heavy focus of these scriptural passages is on the unification of all things in Christ. There are no medieval or patristic citations, no references made to official church teaching—no doubt because of the meagerness of that teaching, as I discussed in the first part of this article. The recovery of an awareness of the possibility for the transformation of the entire created order went hand in hand with a renewed emphasis on Scripture in theology.

Finally, it is important to note that the clause, “which is intimately related to man and attains to its end through him,” does not restate the same thing twice. To be “intimately related to man” and to “attain to its end through him” are not the same thing. The space opened up here by this distinction provides a possible locus for rethinking the transformation of the nonhuman created order as *related* to man, but not taking place *through* him.

Assessment

The limitations of article 48 are also quite apparent. As Pozo points out, the article was inserted in order to respond to a concern surfaced in discussion about the *textus prior* that eschatology was being conceived in a too individual, ascetical, and spiritual way. The cosmic aspect was missing. The Theological Commission responded by the insertion of an article that makes a brief assertion without going into theological problems. And so outside of the fundamental assertions made—(1) That “matter has an eschatological destiny, and attains it through man”; and (2) that the whole universe will somehow be renewed—the paragraph is silent. As Pozo explains,

The Council did not wish to enter into the theological problems that these further aspects present. Various responses of the Theological Commission express the desire to provide the

Morcillo Gonzalez (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 2012), 882–923 at 888, translation mine.

38. Gabás, “Indole Escatologica de la Iglesia Peregrinante,” 895.

39. Juan Alfaro, “Reflections on the Eschatology of Vatican II,” trans. Louis-Bertrand Raymond, in *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives*, ed. René Latourelle (New York: Paulist, 1989), 2:501–13 at 507.

biblical texts that refer to this topic, without concretely explaining their meaning, and without going on to determine what relation exists between this future framework for the life of risen man and the present world in which man lives.⁴⁰

The first assertion is backed up by a long tradition which I sketched out at the beginning of this article. The second assertion is based on a particular reading of certain passages of Scripture but is not clearly demonstrated. Allusions are made, but little more.

We can thus say that to some extent, the teaching of *Lumen Gentium* 48 somewhat follows Thomistic thinking about the New Creation.⁴¹ It is still restrictive in the scope of its implied referent. The “entire world” insofar as it is “intimately related to man” will attain its end “through him.” The word “intimately” appears to be restrictive of the cosmic scope of resurrection. The *reason* for the transformation of the universe is still linked to humanity. Yet the paragraph also takes a significant linguistic step forward in magisterial teaching since it speaks directly about “the entire world.” Furthermore, the relocating of the transformation of the entire created order “in Christ” moves the text well beyond the Thomistic restriction to human need and shifts the question from an anthropological to a christological plane.

The primary step forward is that this transformation will take place “in Christ,” along with scriptural citations that refer to the cosmic scope of the New Creation (Eph 1:10; Col 1:20; 2 Pet 3:10–13). The question of *which* creatures are part of the New Creation has thus been shifted from those creatures that exist in relation to human beings to those creatures that exist in relation to Christ. The *which* and *why* questions about nonhuman creatures have been shifted away from human beings and toward Christ. These questions are given a new christocentric rather than anthropocentric coloring.

40. Pozo, *Theology*, 489.

41. Thomas explains *which* and *how*: “Since man is a part of the corporeal universe, it must remain when man is brought to his final consummation; for a part does not seem complete if it should exist without the whole. Now the corporal universe cannot remain in existence unless its essential parts remain. Yet its essential parts are the heavenly bodies and the elements, such that the whole world system is made up of them; but other bodies do not appear to pertain to the integrity of the corporal universe, but are rather for its adornment and beauty, which is fitting to its changeable state . . . But in the state of final consummation another kind of adornment will be given to the elements that suits their condition of incorruption. Accordingly, in that state, men, the elements, and the heavenly bodies will remain, but not animals or plants or mineral bodies.” See *Compendium theologiae seu brevis compilatio theologiae ad fratrem Raynaldum* I 170 (LC 42: lines 72–91), in Bryan Kromholtz, *On the Last Day: The Time of the Resurrection of the Dead according to Thomas Aquinas* (Fribourg: Academic Press Fribourg, 2010), 226. As to *how*: “Everlasting endurance in substance can only be provided directly by God.” See Kromholtz, *On the Last Day*, 199.

Gaudium et Spes

Schema 13 was one of the most hotly debated texts in the council, and so it comes as no surprise that great caution was employed in describing the nature of the eschatological transformation of creation, especially considering the great paucity of witness in the tradition. The text was debated at the council from September 21 to October 8, 1965. The result that I would like to consider is the first and last paragraph of article 38 and the first paragraph of article 39:

38. For God's Word, through Whom all things were made, was Himself made flesh and dwelt on the earth of men (John 1:14). Thus He entered the world's history as a perfect man, taking that history up into Himself and summarizing it (Eph 1:10). He Himself revealed to us that "God is love" (1 John 4:8) and at the same time taught us that the new command of love was the basic law of human perfection and hence of the world's transformation.

The Lord left behind a pledge of this hope and strength for life's journey in that sacrament of faith where natural elements refined by man are gloriously changed into His Body and Blood, providing a meal of brotherly solidarity and a foretaste of the heavenly banquet.

39. We do not know the time for the consummation of the earth and of humanity (Acts 1:7), nor do we know how all things will be transformed. As deformed by sin, the shape of this world will pass away (1 Cor 7:31; St. Irenaeus); but we are taught that God is preparing a new dwelling place and a new earth where justice will abide (2 Cor 5:2; 2 Pet. 3:13), and whose blessedness will answer and surpass all the longings for peace which spring up in the human heart (1 Cor 2:9; Rev 21:4–5). Then, with death overcome, the sons of God will be raised up in Christ, and what was sown in weakness and corruption will be invested with incorruptibility (1 Cor 15:42 and 53). Enduring with charity and its fruits (1 Cor 13:8; 3:14) all that creation (Rom 8:19–21) which God made on man's account will be unchained from the bondage of vanity.⁴²

The paragraphs above exude both great excitement and great caution. In the deliberation many of the fathers were interested in establishing that "not only man but the whole cosmos has received a new ontological dignity."⁴³ Some of the Council Fathers objected to this move. Xavier Rynne relates,

Abbot Prou of Solesmes objected to the theological implications of the statement that "all creatures," both spiritual and corporal, were intrinsically raised to the supernatural order. It was sounder, he thought, to hold that "only a spiritual creature, and on earth only the human soul, can be elevated to the supernatural order." This was intended as an indirect criticism of Teilhard de Chardin and Père de Lubac.⁴⁴

42. *Gaudium et Spes* (December 7, 1965), 38–39, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

43. Alfaro, "Reflections," 507. Not all of the Council Fathers were favorable to this movement. One "held that only the spiritual creature can be raised to the supernatural order, even though the whole creation is extrinsically referred and oriented to Christ."

44. Xavier Rynne, *The Third Session* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965), 137.

Abbot Reetz of Beuron also praised the schema for “avoiding the ‘exaggerated optimism’ of Teilhard de Chardin.”⁴⁵ But the majority were in favor of emphasizing that, “by reason of the essential connection of the cosmos with man as the created centre of its meaning, all creatures are raised to a new dignity in him.”⁴⁶ Notwithstanding the concern about “Teilhardian Optimism,” the fathers demanded a “Christian cosmology” in which human work was truly taken into eschatological account.⁴⁷ Albert Meyer (Chicago, USA) commented in the discussion that “God offers the hope of glory not only to the human soul but to the whole person and the entire world.”⁴⁸ Silvia Henriquez (Santiago, Chile) “called for a ‘Christian cosmology,’”⁴⁹ and Denis Hurley (Durban, South Africa) “explicitly praised the ‘splendid vision’ of the ‘illustrious son of the Church,’ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.”⁵⁰ The frequent mention of Teilhard is worth noting since there was both excitement and concern about his work. As we shall see, 50 years later he remains relevant in the formation and imagination of *Laudato Si’*.

Yet on the other hand, the text also expresses great caution. One of the interim texts from 1963 that developed out of a series of conversations that took place in the archiepiscopal palace in Malines (hence called the “Malines schema”) presented a much more robust eschatological vision.⁵¹ The second Malines text of February 1–3, 1964 recommended a stronger emphasis on the new heaven and the new earth as well as “the theme of the creative and enlightening Word.” But these suggestions were rejected as too dogmatic.⁵² In the end, explains Charles Moeller, “A view of history and the universe in the perspective of the plan of salvation ... almost completely disappeared ... through anxiety not to go beyond what is biblically certain in this respect. Any confusion with Teilhardism is impossible. The text takes up a position beyond systems.”⁵³ He also notes that many of the themes that were removed from the final *schema* were related to Eastern theology. For example: “The theme of the Church which in its liturgy ‘transforms the world.’ In the Malines schema there was a whole

45. Norman Tanner, “The Church in the World (*Ecclesia ad Extra*),” in Alberigo and Komonchak, *History of Vatican II*, vol. 4, *Church as Communion, Third Period and Intersession; September 1964–September 1965*, 269–386 at 286.

46. Alfons Auer, “Man’s Activity throughout the World,” in Vorgrimler, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, 5:182–201 at 196.

47. Five fathers wanted the word “assumens” (here translated “taking up”) removed on the grounds that Ephesians 1:10 mentions “recapitulatio” rather than “assumptio,” which could lead to confusion about “cosmic incarnation.” They received a response to their concern: “The modus is rejected because the idea of the assumption of history is entirely traditional, biblical and patristic. Nothing is said here about a cosmic incarnation.” Auer, “Man’s Activity throughout the World,” 197.

48. Tanner, “The Church in the World,” 285.

49. Tanner, “The Church in the World,” 285.

50. Tanner, “The Church in the World,” 285.

51. Charles Moeller, “History of the Constitution,” in Vorgrimler, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, 5:1–76 at 21. For more on the Malines text, see Dries Bosschaert, “Understanding the Shift in *Gaudium et Spes*: From Theology of History to Christian Anthropology,” *Theological Studies* 78:3 (2017): 634–58.

52. Moeller, “History of the Constitution,” 29.

53. Moeller, “History of the Constitution,” 72.

article devoted to this eschatological humanism.”⁵⁴ The result is a text that, “however rich it may be, remained too Western.”⁵⁵ As we will see, *Laudato Si’* offers a healthy corrective by borrowing richly from the East.

Gaudium et Spes 38

The two selected paragraphs in article 38 focus on the Incarnation and the Eucharist. First, article 38 quotes from Ephesians 1:10, noting that in Christ “all things” are taken up and “summarized” (*assumens et recapitulans; anakephalaiōsasthai* is the Greek for “recapitulated”). This is not “cosmic incarnation,” but it is a cosmic vision of Christ at the head of all creation and not just human creation. Furthermore, emphasis is again laid on the fact that it is through the humanity of Christ primarily, rather than through human beings in general, that creation reaches its goal. If an anthropological model continues to remain central, it is a model subordinated to the assumed humanity of Christ. Second, the mention of the Eucharist in article 38 in the context of eschatological transformation is important. It will play an important part in *Laudato Si’*, and it functioned importantly for the Council Fathers. As Alfons Auer explains, “The mysterious renovation of all creation is not only announced here in advance but is already realized inchoatively ... In a single sentence the Pastoral Constitution briefly but plainly expresses these essential aspects of the Eucharist (the cosmic, the social and the eschatological).”⁵⁶

Gaudium et Spes 39

The first paragraph of article 39, like *Lumen Gentium* 48, asserts the transformation of all creation without providing any kind of detailed explanation. There is a clear affirmation that “all things” will be transformed. Of particular interest is footnote 16 (of the English translation) in this paragraph. The footnote comes at the end of the affirmation that, “as deformed by sin, the shape (*figura*) of this world will pass away.” The cited reference here is not only to 1 Corinthians 7:31, but also to the teaching of Irenaeus in *Against Heresies*. Irenaeus explains,

For since there are real men, so must there also be a real establishment [*plantationem*], that they vanish not away among non-existent things, but progress among those which have an actual existence. For neither is the substance nor the essence of the creation annihilated (for faithful and true is He who has established it), but “*the fashion of the world passes away*” (1 Cor 7:31); that is, those things among which transgression has occurred, since man has grown old in them ... But when this [present] fashion [of things] passes away, and man has been renewed, and flourishes in an incorruptible state, so as to preclude the possibility of becoming old, [then] there shall be the new heaven and the new earth, in which the new man shall remain continually, always holding fresh converse with God. And since [*or, that*] these

54. Moeller, “History of the Constitution,” 72.

55. Moeller, “History of the Constitution,” 72.

56. Alfons Auer, “Man’s Activity,” 195–96.

things shall ever continue without end, Isaiah declares, “For as the new heavens and the new earth which I do make, continue in my sight, says the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain” (Isa 66:22).⁵⁷

This important passage from Irenaeus allows the Council Fathers to point in a particular direction without dogmatically espousing a cosmic vision.

The background of Irenaeus’s theology in this text is profoundly non-dualistic. Renowned Irenaeus scholar Antonio Orbe explains that, under the influence of Justin Martyr, Irenaeus believes that “every creature requires the conserving influence of the Creator.”⁵⁸ For Irenaeus, there is no difference here between material and immaterial creation: “In itself it [*substantia*, *hypostasis*] could indicate the primary substrate of creation, both the visible and the invisible, common to both angels and the sub-lunar world.”⁵⁹ The entire created order, sustained by the Creator, is composed of three aspects: Substance (*hypostasis*), the “primary substrate” common to all beings, whether material or immaterial, visible or invisible; matter (*ousia*), the primary material from which proceed all material beings (probably the four Greek elements); and figure (*schema*), the determining principle of concrete material beings.⁶⁰ *Schema*, the concrete form of prime matter, is that which “passes away.” Irenaeus argues that only the *schema* of this world that has been affected by human sin must change and be transformed as a result of this contamination. Orbe explains,

Properly, neither the heavens nor the earth (sensible components of the world) in which Adam transgressed aged in *hypostasis* or *ousia*. Only in its figure (*schēma*): innocent and new in the wake of creation, contaminated and aged in the wake of sin. They change only qualitatively.⁶¹

The figure of this world in which sin took place will pass away. It has grown old and must be transformed. Irenaeus speaks of creation in the same way that he speaks of the human body: That in which sin was committed must be transformed, but the substance and essence will remain. As Paul says, the figure of this world is passing away, but it will be transformed in the New Creation (Isa 66:22). Brian E. Daley clarifies that “Irenaeus’ underlying concern seems to be to defend the inclusion of the material side of creation in the unified plan of God’s salvation.”⁶²

57. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 5.36 (Migne, *PG*, 8.1221), trans. Alexander Roberts and William Rambaut in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing, 1885), <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103536.htm>.

58. Antonio Orbe, *Teología de San Ireneo: Comentario al Libro V del “Adversus haereses”*: III (Madrid-Toledo: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1988), 559, translation mine.

59. Orbe, *Teología de San Ireneo*, 560.

60. Orbe, *Teología de San Ireneo*, 562.

61. Orbe, *Teología de San Ireneo*, 566.

62. Daley, *The Hope*, 31.

Assessment

As with *Lumen Gentium* 48, these paragraphs of *Gaudium et Spes* represent both a great step forward and a profound limitation. First, while it is affirmed that all creation will be transformed—a large step forward in magisterial teaching—there is no explicit description of *which creatures* will be part of this transformation. In other words, the question as to whether the *figura* of creation, in the form of particular creatures (as opposed to the “substance” and “essence” of creation) will remain is not answered. Second, as to the question of *why*, the vision remains profoundly anthropocentric. On the one hand, as we saw in *Lumen Gentium*, the eschatological hope of nonhuman creation is now to be located in the mysteries of the Incarnation and the Eucharist. Creation attains its end primarily through Christ and only secondarily through human beings, by means of their labors united with the “natural elements” transformed in the Eucharist. Yet on the other hand, creation continues to exist unequivocally “on man’s account.” Even for Irenaeus, the reason that there must be a new “planting” is because there are real human beings (*veri homines*). Auer affirms this fundamental theological background in *Gaudium et Spes*:

The second basis of any theology of activity is the anthropocentric character of the world. Recent philosophical doctrines of man have clearly shown that the cosmos has to be shaped in relation to man, that it is ultimately an extension of his own corporeality and that it therefore has a thoroughly personal relevance. Man can only develop and fulfill himself if at the same time he develops and brings to fulfillment the world which in him is comprised in unity.⁶³

It is not yet enough theologically that the cosmos be “related” to man. It must continue to be understood as attaining its end “through” him. Even as the vision has become more “cosmic” in its scope, it remains profoundly anthropocentric. As Phan explains, “Even when it included the cosmos in the process of salvation (‘the new heavens and the new earth’), the perspective was heavily anthropocentric, that is, it viewed the redeemed cosmos mainly as the new habitat for the glorified humanity.”⁶⁴

As in the case of *Lumen Gentium* 48, the other important development is in *how* all creation will be transformed. The mechanism of transformation has been more deeply sacramentalized than in the previous stage. While in Aquinas, for example, God will resurrect certain creatures through an act of will on account of humanity’s happiness, in *Gaudium et Spes* the mechanism of resurrection is intimately linked to the Incarnation and the Eucharist. This offers a less arbitrarily anthropocentric vision to the New Creation by rooting the mechanism for cosmic transformation in the Incarnation and the sacramental life of the church.

63. Auer, “Man’s Activity,” 201.

64. Peter C. Phan, “Eschatology: Contemporary Context and Issues in Eschatology,” in *Church and Theology: Essays in Memory of Carl J. Peter*, ed. Peter Phan (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 507–36 at 534.

Stage Three: *Laudato Si'* and the Embrace of Christ (2015)

Between 1965 and 2015, the years in which Vatican II ended and *Laudato Si'* was published, two documents concerning eschatology were promulgated by the Holy See. The first, a "Letter on Certain Questions concerning Eschatology," was published by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 1979.⁶⁵ The second document, entitled "Some Current Questions in Eschatology," was written in 1992 by the International Theological Commission.⁶⁶ Neither document developed the cosmic aspect of eschatology envisioned in the documents of Vatican II. The 1992 document reaffirms the "ecclesial aspect" of the beatitude of the individual soul and then notes that the "whole of creation will be subject to Christ," referencing Romans 8:21 (5.4). Nothing more is said about nonhuman creation.⁶⁷ One must thus look elsewhere to explain the emergence of *LS* onto the theological scene.⁶⁸

Francis employs a method that is quite close to that adopted by Pope John XXIII in *Humanae Salutis*: He begins with a reading of the negative "signs of the times." Although he never uses that phrase, in chapter 1, "What is Happening to Our Common Home," he makes frequent use of that word "signs." Reference is made to: "signs of pollution" (*LS* 59), "signs that things are now reaching a breaking point" (*LS* 61), signs "of reductionism" (*LS* 107), and "of disregard" (*LS* 117). Francis's extremely harsh criticism of the "technological paradigm" (*LS* 108) and the "technocratic paradigm" (*LS* 109) is his starting point for reflection on the current environmental crisis in the light of the Gospel. His analysis of the asymmetrical progress of moral development alongside technological development closely matches that of Pope John XXIII. His solution is, in part, to clarify more deeply the eschatological destination of nonhuman creation.

Even more significantly, taking the poetic prayer of St. Francis of Assisi as a starting point, Pope Francis allows our "mother" and "sister" Earth to address us with her questions (*LS* 1). The methodological approach of Vatican II and liberation theologies

65. Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter on Certain Questions concerning Eschatology* (May 17, 1979), http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19790517_escatologia_en.html.

66. International Theological Commission, *Some Current Questions on Eschatology* (1992), http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_1990_problemi-attuali-escatologia_en.html.

67. Phan is very critical on this point. There is a place, he argues, for "liberationist" forms of eschatology, which are completely eschewed by the 1992 *Questions in Eschatology* document and branded "temporal messianism." See Phan, "Contemporary Context," 533.

68. It is possible to point to many fruitful sources for the emergence of the teaching of *LS*. One source, as for Vatican II, is its work of *ressourcement*, drawing deeply upon the inspiration of St. Francis of Assisi. As another source, following the inspiration of Vatican II, *LS* also draws more deeply upon the theology of the Eastern Churches. A third source is *LS*'s attempt to draw richly upon the "analytical mediation" of the environmental sciences as its "first mediation." The encyclical employs these scientific conclusions primarily in chapter 1. Another important source is the ecological teachings of bishops' conferences. No less than 14 bishops' conference documents on ecological and environmental issues are cited. These citations make up a large bulk of the encyclical and emphasize Pope Francis's

comes to fruition by allowing even nonhuman voices to “speak.” While Vatican II remained more anthropocentrically focused on the “cosmic” crisis of humanity, the full cosmic concerns of Mother Earth come into focus in *LS*. While the church’s concern for creation has always been “implicit” in her tradition, Pope Francis’s now explicit eschatological teaching on nonhuman creation is the fruit of his analytic engagement with contemporary ecological and environmental concerns.

Francis is clear that he intends to contribute to the doctrinal development of Catholic social teaching. He is explicit that the contents of this encyclical letter are to be “added to the body of the Church’s social teaching” (*LS* 15). As part of this doctrinal development of the church’s social teaching, Francis also sees an obvious need to develop the doctrine of humanity’s relationship to the whole created order. He thus frames chapters 3–5, in which he offers his development of social doctrine, with chapters 2 and 6, in which he offers a development of the church’s doctrine of creation, specifically, the relation of human beings to the created order. By doctrinally developing the eschatological fulfillment of each and every nonhuman creature,⁶⁹ he eschatologically grounds human action toward the material world in the biblical vision of the New Creation.

collegial methodology and reliance upon regional episcopal teaching. Finally, following the period after Vatican II, there has been a significant amount of theological work relating to questions of theology and science, in particular evolution. Within that vast field of literature, some works deal more specifically, though often hesitantly, with the question of individual nonhuman creatures in the New Creation. Of note, to name only a few, are the eschatological visions of Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), and Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God*, vol. 6, *The Fulfillment of Creation*, trans. Ioan Ionita (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox, 2013) in the East; and in the West the rich work of Robert J. Russell in *Cosmology: From Alpha to Omega* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2008) and elsewhere; Denis Edwards, *Breath of Life: A Theology of the Creator Spirit* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004), and “Eucharist and Ecology: Keeping Memorial of Creation,” *Worship* 82, no. 3 (May 2008): 194–213, among other works; Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014); Christopher Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation: God, Evolution, and the Problem of Evil* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2008); and Paul J. Griffiths, *Decreation: The Last Things of All Creatures* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014). While the range of literature is vast and impressive on the interaction between theology and evolution, these texts in particular deal with the question of individual nonhuman creatures in the New Creation.

69. I envision “each creature” to refer to every single creature or individual living substance that has ever existed or will ever exist, from $t=0$ until the eschatological transformation of the New Creation. I follow here the speculative suggestion of Paul Griffiths: “The idea that all plant and animal kinds have their place in the resurrection is supported by the fact that it gives proper credit to the excessiveness of the LORD’s creative action . . . If heaven is the world healed, the world made beautiful as cosmos, Eden transfigured by the presence of the flesh of Christ and of Mary, as well as by the resurrected flesh of the saints, and if excess is a mark not of the double fall but rather of the LORD’s delight, *then all plant and animal kinds, with all their individual members*, should be present there, transfigured as inhabitants of the peaceable kingdom” (emphasis added). Griffiths, *Decreation*, 293.

Laudato Si' 83

I will begin with paragraph 83:

The ultimate destiny of the universe is in the fullness of God, which has already been attained by the risen Christ, the measure of the maturity of all things [53]. Here we can add yet another argument for rejecting every tyrannical and irresponsible domination of human beings over other creatures. The ultimate purpose of other creatures is not to be found in us. Rather, all creatures are moving forward with us and through us towards a common point of arrival, which is God, in that transcendent fullness where the risen Christ embraces and illumines all things.

This is a very nuanced paragraph. It reaffirms that “other creatures” do not find their purpose in human beings, although they move forward “with us and through us” toward God. On the one hand, this is a restatement of *Lumen Gentium* 48’s “intimately related to man and attains to its end through him.” Creation reaches God “with us and through us.” On the other hand, two new notes must be pointed out. First, the mention of “other creatures” is important. No longer does the magisterium point ambiguously to creation in general which, as we have seen, remains open to many interpretations. Rather, particular mention is made of “other creatures,” creatures which are presumably not simply the four elements. Furthermore, footnote 53 of the encyclical directs us to “the contribution of Fr. Teilhard de Chardin,” a contribution which, as we saw, was quite contentious during the council. This contribution is further clarified in the footnote by a quotation from Pope Benedict XVI, who explains in a homily,

The role of the priesthood is to consecrate the world so that it may become a living host, a liturgy: so that the liturgy may not be something alongside the reality of the world, but that the world itself shall become a living host, a liturgy. This is also the great vision of Teilhard de Chardin: in the end we shall achieve a true cosmic liturgy, where the cosmos becomes a living host.

The “great vision” of Teilhard de Chardin of the cosmos as a living host is found in his *Hymn of the Universe*. In chapter 1, “The Mass on the World,” he hymns forth:

Over every living thing which is to spring up, to grow, to flower, to ripen during this day say again the words: This is my Body. And over every death-force which waits in readiness to corrode, to wither, to cut down, speak again your commanding words which express the supreme mystery of faith: This is my Blood.⁷⁰

The eucharistic vision tentatively invoked in *Gaudium et Spes* 39 comes to a rich fulfillment. *Gaudium et Spes* 39 was primarily anthropocentric in its ecclesial vision; here in *Laudato Si' 83* it has become cosmic.

70. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 23, also at <https://www.religion-online.org/blog/book-chapter/chapter-1-the-mass-on-the-world/>.

Second, “the ultimate purpose of creatures is not to be found in us.” Animals, for example, do not go to heaven because human beings need them for enjoyment, as in the theology of Thomas Aquinas. “Other creatures” find their fulfillment in God, and they will arrive at eschatological fullness because God desires that they attain to their fullness in him.

Laudato Si’ 99–100

Gaudium et Spes 38 discussed the presence of the Logos in the cosmos in the incarnational and eucharistic mysteries. This presence is echoed in *Laudato Si’* 99: “From the beginning of the world, but particularly through the incarnation, the mystery of Christ is at work in a hidden manner in the natural world as a whole, without thereby impinging on its autonomy.” Yet *Laudato Si’* does not stop at the Incarnation, the mystery by which “He entered the world’s history as a perfect man, taking that history up into Himself and summarizing it” (*GS* 38). It goes on to affirm in paragraph 100 that it is through the Resurrection that Christ directs all creatures toward their perfect end:

The New Testament does not only tell us of the earthly Jesus and his tangible and loving relationship with the world. It also shows him risen and glorious, present throughout creation by his universal Lordship: “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross” (Col 1:19–20). This leads us to direct our gaze to the end of time, when the Son will deliver all things to the Father, so that “God may be everything to every one” (1 Cor 15:28). Thus, the creatures of this world no longer appear to us under merely natural guise because the risen One is mysteriously holding them to himself and directing them towards fullness as their end. The very flowers of the field and the birds which his human eyes contemplated and admired are now imbued with his radiant presence.

I would like to highlight three features of this text. First, Christ is present not only as the Logos of creation and Incarnation; he is now present throughout creation through his Resurrection. By means of his Resurrection, Christ reconciles all things and, in Pope Francis’s eschatological vision, holds them to himself and directs them toward their fullness. Second, Pope Francis again explicitly mentions “the creatures of this world.” These “creatures” are explicitly the very “flowers of the field” and the “birds which his human eyes contemplated.” Each of these particular creatures is filled with the resurrected presence of Christ and directed toward “fullness as their end.” The “anthropological” vision of creation is now decidedly christocentric. Creatures attain their fullness through humanity only insofar as Christ was human. This does not mean that human action and work do not play a role. In the vision of Teilhard, it remains the priestly role of the people of God to offer up creation to the Father on the eucharistic altar. Yet creatures no longer attain to their fullness because of human beings. They are not directed toward the eschaton because human beings need them in heaven. Finally, as noted before, creatures attain their own fullness. This means that creatures will not be in heaven because of the need of human beings. They will be there so that “God may be everything to everyone” (1 Cor 15:28). God wants to be everything to every-

one—including the flowers and birds. To the limit of their capacity, God will be everything to them as well.

Laudato Si' 243

The final passage I would like to consider is paragraph 243:

At the end, we will find ourselves face to face with the infinite beauty of God (cf. 1 Cor 13:12), and be able to read with admiration and happiness the mystery of the universe, which with us will share in unending plenitude. Even now we are journeying towards the sabbath of eternity, the new Jerusalem, towards our common home in heaven. Jesus says: "I make all things new" (Rev 21:5). Eternal life will be a shared experience of awe, in which each creature, resplendently transfigured, will take its rightful place and have something to give those poor men and women who will have been liberated once and for all.

The last sentence of this paragraph is rather stunning as a doctrinal development. Once again, Pope Francis writes with great clarity about *which* creatures will experience the "shared experience of awe." "Each creature" will participate. Each creature will be "resplendently transfigured." There is currently no Latin text of *Laudato Si'*, making it difficult to make connections between this word "transfigured" and texts we have already discussed from Vatican II. Yet it is hard not to imagine that "resplendently transfigured" is a reference to the transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor.⁷¹ It is not unlikely, though not verified, that an echo is here present of *Gaudium et Spes* 39: "nor do we know how all things will be transformed [*transformandi*]. As deformed by sin, the shape [*figura*] of this world will pass away." Regardless, the "figura" of each creature will now be "transfigured" and will be given its "rightful place." It is notable that this "rightful place" has only now been granted to all nonhuman creatures. If the New Creation is truly their rightful place, then this marks a significant development of doctrine.

It is also noteworthy that nonhuman creatures continue to relate to human beings. But they are not in a position of subservience. Rather, "with us" they will "share in

71. This possible reference to the Transfiguration is a profoundly Eastern theme. The transfiguring and divinizing light of Christ on Tabor is the eschatological light that shines upon and divinizes the entire created order. Dumitru Stăniloae explains: "The radiance from Tabor will be extended over the whole world. The world will then be the generalized Tabor. The divine life in Christ's body will fill the whole world ... Through this the entire creation becomes pneumatic, incorruptible, deified, and transparent." See Stăniloae, *The Experience of God*, vol. 6, *The Fulfillment of Creation*, 151–52. Even the smallest flower will participate in this deification. Stăniloae draws attention to the theology of St. Symeon: "At that time the entire world and its components will surpass the state of opaque objects. St. Symeon speaks of spiritual flowers and calls the entire world spiritual and intelligible, as it is no longer a world of objects that are external to persons." Stăniloae, *The Experience of God*, vol. 6, *The Fulfillment of Creation*, 156. Eastern theology comes back onto the scene also in *LS* 236 through the theme of divinization. Francis quotes from Benedict XVI: "In the bread of the Eucharist, 'creation is projected towards divinization.'"

unending plenitude.” Likewise, the human beings highlighted by Pope Francis with whom these creatures are in relation are “those poor men and women.” Just as the poor in contemporary theology, and particularly in liberation theology, have begun to take their “rightful place” in theological discourse, so too each nonhuman creature will take its rightful place, not in heaven abstractly, but in the vision of God and in continuous ecstatic communion with the poor.

Concluding Assessment

Throughout this article I have asked: the *which*, *why*, and *how* questions of magisterial documents concerning the New Creation. For the first time with *Laudato Si'*, a magisterial document states clearly that among the creatures who will take part in the New Creation are “each creature,” “all creatures,” “the creatures of this world,” and “the very flowers of the field and the birds which his human eyes contemplated and admired.” With great specificity, Pope Francis teaches the unity of the created order transfigured in the New Creation. He leaves none of the doubt that lingers after Vatican II about whether specific nonhuman creatures will be part of the New Creation.

The answer of *why* is now only derivatively anthropocentric. Yes, creatures will “have something to give those poor men and women who will have been liberated once and for all.” Yes, they continue to move toward their finality “through us.” Human beings play a critical role in the transformation of creation. But the question of *why* has taken on dramatically new contours. Well beyond either first- or second-stage eschatology, in this third stage “the ultimate purpose of other creatures is not to be found in us.” Rather, the reason that each creature will be “resplendently transfigured” is “so that “God may be everything to every one” (1 Cor 15:28). Thus, the creatures of this world no longer appear to us under merely natural guise because the risen One is mysteriously holding them to himself and directing them towards fullness as their end” (*LS* 100). God wants to be the fullness of each creature. The Son wants to hold them to himself in an eschatological embrace. That is *why* each creature will be part of the New Creation.

Finally, *how* God will raise each creature to his cosmic embrace is deeply rooted in the Incarnation, the Resurrection, and the mystery of the Eucharist. We have seen how Vatican II tentatively developed the incarnational and eucharistic dimensions of cosmic transformation in the New Creation. Francis now explicitly points to all three as modes of God’s transforming work. Through the Incarnation, “all the creatures of the material universe find their true meaning in the incarnate Word, for the Son of God has incorporated in his person part of the material world, planting in it a seed of definitive transformation” (*LS* 235). Furthermore, through the Resurrection, “The New Testament does not only tell us of the earthly Jesus and his tangible and loving relationship with the world. It also shows him risen and glorious, present throughout creation by his universal Lordship” (*LS* 100). Christ is present in his creation as the resurrected One, mysteriously “directing them” in this role. This means that even now the material universe has been elevated in the embrace of Christ and is being mysteriously transformed from within. The primary mechanism of this transformation is the Eucharist:

“The Lord, in the culmination of the mystery of the Incarnation, chose to reach our intimate depths through a fragment of matter in the bread of the Eucharist, ‘creation is projected towards divinization, towards the holy wedding feast, towards unification with the Creator himself’” (*LS* 236). Drawing upon the Eastern tradition of divinization with this quotation from Benedict XVI, Francis makes the Eucharist the locus of the transfigurative power of the resurrected Christ on the behalf of the New Creation. Each creature even now experiences its own deification in the mystery of the Eucharist.

I have argued that in the first stage, the three questions I have asked received answers focused primarily on Clodovis Boff’s “theological criteria” and employed principally philosophical tools of mediation. The second stage inaugurated by Vatican II marked a methodological shift. While the answers that came out of *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes* were tentative in scope, the shift in methodology significantly redrew the boundaries of theological discourse. As I have shown, many questions were raised by the Council Fathers concerning the cosmic destination of all creatures. This methodological shift, which focused more on the “pistic criteria” and sought through socio-analytic tools of mediation to access the broader concerns of humanity, came to even fuller fruition in the teaching of *Laudato Si’*. Erected upon the “building site” of Vatican II, for the first time, a magisterial document teaches that “each creature” will find its place in the New Creation. In Pope Francis, the “questions” of even nonhuman creation are heard and given an eschatological answer.

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