

The Theology of *Laudato Si'*



Creation

“The traditional Christian redemptive mystique is little concerned with any cosmological order or process since the essential thing is redemption out of the world through a relationship with a personal saviour that transcends all such concerns.”

- Thomas Berry, “The New Story.”



Creation

“The basic mood of the future might well be one of confidence in the continuing revelation that takes place in and through the earth. If the dynamics of the universe from the beginning shaped the course of the heavens, lighted the sun, and formed the earth –if this same dynamism brought forth the continents and seas and atmosphere, if it awakened life in the primordial cell and then brought into being the unnumbered variety of living beings and finally brought man into being and guided him safely through the turbulent centuries– there is reason to believe that this same guiding process is precisely what has awakened in man his present understanding of himself and his relation to this stupendous process. Sensitized to this guidance we can have confidence in the future that awaits the human venture.”

- Thomas Berry, “The New Story.”



Creation

“The essential factor in the process [of attraction in the thermodynamic evolution of physical systems] is the dynamic by which the system is directed locally towards a physical state which is at yet unrealized, but nevertheless gives the appearance that it is attracting to itself at the given stage the evolution of the whole system. This analogy allows comparison of the evolutionary operation of an immanent God to the role of an attractor which forces a new direction of development on processes not susceptible to the principles of determinism. **Despite the discontinuities we find in evolution, it is possible to speak in a meaningful way about how evolutionary processes are locally directed as a result of the operation of the attractor.**”

- Archbishop Josef Zycinski, *God and Evolution*.



Creation

“Theology must attempt to deal with the costs built into the process of evolution: the loss, the pain, the predation, the deaths, and the extinctions of most species that ever lived over the 3.8-billion-year history of life.¹⁷ If modern humans emerged only in the last 200,000 years, then all of these costs cannot be reasonably attributed to human sin, as many Christians have done in the past. It seems the responsibility for the costs of evolution rests with the Creator—at least for those who believe in God. **An evolutionary view of the world thus intensifies the age-old theological problem of evil because of the sheer scale of the suffering because it seems intrinsic to the process and because it seems the Creator is responsible.** Why does God create in a way that is so devastatingly costly for so many creatures? Perhaps part of the answer is that this is who we are. Could we be who we are in some other kind of creation?”

- Denis Edwards, “Incarnation, Evolution, Communion.”



Creation

“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. **Human beings, endowed with intelligence and love, and drawn by the fullness of Christ, are called to lead all creatures back to their Creator.**”

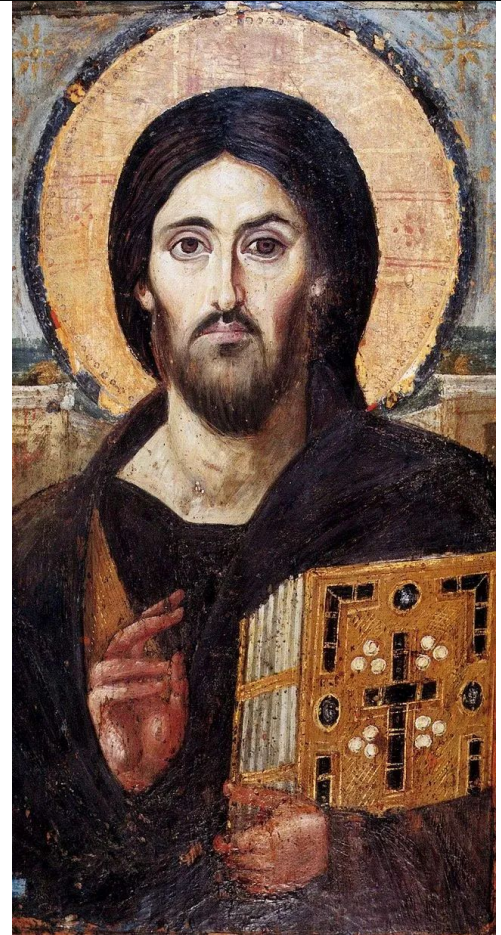
- *Laudato Si'*, para. 83.



Incarnation

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.”

- John 1



Incarnation

“For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. **We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.** Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.”

- Romans 8.



Incarnation

"The Word was made flesh in order that we might be made as gods. ... **Just as the Lord, putting on the body, became a man, so also we men are deified through his flesh, and henceforth inherit everlasting life...** He it is that was crucified before the sun and all creation as witnesses, and before those who put Him to death: and by His death has salvation come to all, and all creation been saved. "

- Athanasius



Incarnation

“The incarnation of God in Christ can be understood as a radical or “deep” incarnation, that is, an incarnation into the very tissue of biological existence, and systems of nature. Understood this way, the death of Christ becomes an icon of God's redemptive co-suffering with all sentient life as well as with the victims of social competition. God bears the cost of evolution, the price involved in the hardship of natural selection.”

- Niels Gregersen, ‘The Cross of Christ in an Evolutionary World.’



Incarnation

“Jesus Christ, God became part of the nexus of the entire cosmos ... As a human being he was also a material being. His body was composed of material particles coming from the explosion of stars. His blood was red due to the iron running in his veins. And, like any other mammal, he was hosting a great hidden microbial world (bacteria and other microorganisms) that he carried with him, and without which he could not sustain his life as a human being. The biblical concept of “flesh” has this broad-scale material meaning underneath the particular meanings referring to concrete bodies and the world of sin.”

- Niels Gregersen, ‘The Cross of Christ in an Evolutionary World.’



Incarnation

“Rather than being a barrier that distances us from the divine, the matter of this world can function as a mediation to the immediacy of God. Hence it is by carrying out our creative responsibilities in and through and to the world, not by fleeing it, that we set out on the road to redemption. This roots ecological ethics in the deepest core of Christian faith.”

- Sister Elizabeth Johnson



Incarnation

“An appropriate understanding of the Creator’s presence in and to creation must not blur the difference in ontological status between Creator and creatures, for that would jeopardize a vital distinction. Categories singular to deity should not be transferred to creatures. Incarnation is concerned with the conjunction of the divine and the human in the specific and singular instance of Jesus Christ. **I am very sympathetic to the theological need to stress divine presence to the travail of creation in an act of redemptive solidarity between Creator and creatures, but I do not believe that a widened concept of incarnation is the way to achieve this. In fact, a harsh critic might say that a promiscuous use of the concept of incarnation carries with it a dangerous whiff of pantheism.**”

- John Polkinghorne



Incarnation

“For Christians, **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.** Christianity does not reject matter. Rather, bodiliness is considered in all its value in the liturgical act, whereby the human body is disclosed in its inner nature as a temple of the Holy Spirit and is united with the Lord Jesus, who himself took a body for the world’s salvation.”

- *Laudato Si'*, para. 236.



Incarnation

“Joined to the incarnate Son, present in the Eucharist, the whole cosmos gives thanks to God. Indeed the Eucharist is itself an act of cosmic love: Yes, cosmic! Because even when it is celebrated on the humble altar of a country church, the Eucharist is always in some way celebrated on the altar of the world. The Eucharist joins heaven and earth; it embraces and penetrates all creation. The world which came forth from God’s hands returns to him in blessed and undivided adoration: in the bread of the Eucharist, creation is projected towards divinization, towards the holy wedding feast, towards unification with the Creator himself. Thus, the Eucharist is also a source of light and motivation for our concerns for the environment, directing us to be stewards of all creation.”

- *Laudato Si'*, para. 236.



The Communion of Creation

“What can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made.”

- Romans 1



The Communion of Creation

“Our natural knowledge begins from sense. Hence our natural knowledge can go as far as it can be led by sensible things. But our mind cannot be led by sense so far as to see the essence of God; because the sensible effects of God do not equal the power of God as their cause. **Hence from the knowledge of sensible things the whole power of God cannot be known; nor therefore can His essence be seen. But because they are His effects and depend on their cause, we can be led from them so far as to know of God “whether He exists,” and to know of Him what must necessarily belong to Him, as the first cause of all things, exceeding all things caused by Him.”**

- Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* First Part, Question 12.



The Communion of Creation

“The distinction and multitude of things come from the intention of the first agent, who is God. For He brought things into being in order that His goodness might be communicated to creatures, and be represented by them; and because His goodness could not be adequately represented by one creature alone, He produced many and diverse creatures, that what was wanting to one in the representation of the divine goodness might be supplied by another. **For goodness, which in God is simple and uniform, in creatures is manifold and divided and hence the whole universe together participates the divine goodness more perfectly, and represents it better than any single creature whatever.**”

- Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* First Part, Question 12.



The Communion of Creation

“Based on an expansive understanding of human evolution developing in supercomplex and what might be termed hyperco-operative communities that are themselves strongly shaped by dynamic ecological relationships... What might it mean for our human moral world to be so closely informed by the lives and practices of animals in a multi-species commons?”

- Celia Deane Drummond, *The Wisdom of the Liminal*.



The Communion of Creation

“We take these systems into account not only to determine how best to use them, but also because they have an intrinsic value independent of their usefulness. Each organism, as a creature of God, is good and admirable in itself; the same is true of the harmonious ensemble of organisms existing in a defined space and functioning as a system.”

- *Laudato Si'*, para. 140.



The Communion of Creation

“The human person grows more, matures more and is sanctified more to the extent that he or she enters into relationships, going out from themselves to live in communion with God, with others and with all creatures. In this way, they make their own that trinitarian dynamism which God imprinted in them when they were created. Everything is interconnected, and this invites us to develop a spirituality of that global solidarity which flows from the mystery of the Trinity.”

- *Laudato Si'*, para. 140.



The Communion of Creation

“The Catechism clearly and forcefully criticizes a distorted anthropocentrism. Each creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection. Each of the various creatures, willed in its own being, reflects in its own way a ray of God’s infinite wisdom and goodness. Man must therefore respect the particular goodness of every creature, to avoid any disordered use of things.”

- *Laudato Si'*, para. 69.



Key Questions

1. “The traditional Christian redemptive mystique is little concerned with any cosmological order.” Do you agree?
2. Why would a good God choose natural selection as the mode for creation?
3. Why is it significant that the matter which made up Christ’s body still exists on this planet?
4. Does the theology of deep incarnation lead to Pantheism?
5. What does it mean to say that an animal is ‘good’?