

We Are Not God: Reflections on the Theology of *Laudato Si**

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“We are not God. The earth was here before us and it has been given to us” (*Laudato Si* §67) by “a Father Who Creates and Who Alone Owns the World” (§75)

Is Catholic Social Teaching a specifically theological enterprise? And if so, can one show it in the case of the most recent magisterial instantiation of Catholic Social Teaching, Pope Francis’s 2015 encyclical letter *Laudato Si*, On the Care for Our Common Home? I think that a positive answer must be given to both questions. Part of the reasons I think so are of an autobiographical nature. About forty-five years ago I founded an environmental youth group, the first ever in my hometown in northern Bavaria. This youth group was part of a youth network that was a branch of a national environmental organization. I am talking here about the academic year 1974–1975, just about four years after Greenpeace had been founded in Vancouver, Canada, and five years before the Green Party was to be founded in then West Germany. The wake-up call and catalyst for my initiative had been a memorable encounter with the first Club of Rome Report from 1972, *The Limits to Growth*. This report shocked me and my friends into an acute awareness of an approaching ecological crisis. Our environmental youth group was a first local activist response. In our high-school chemistry lab, we tested the—at that time rather alarming—water

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quality of the main river in our area and publicized our findings in the local newspaper; we organized polls, public events, and demonstrations in order to raise the awareness of the local population about environmental challenges and threats; we also organized the first municipal glass-recycling program; and we overall acted as “mud rakers,” exposing in the local newspaper pollution caused by companies, municipalities, and private organizations. Needless to say, we did not only have friends.

Most members of our youth group eventually joined the Green Party when it was founded in 1980. I, however, decided to study philosophy and theology at the university. And this decision is part of the providential chain of events that brings me to this conference today and to the topic I am speaking about. Those among you my age or older might remember that in the mid-1970s in Europe and in the United States neither the Catholic Church nor the Protestants were really concerned about the unfolding global environmental crisis. One noteworthy exception was Blessed Pope Paul VI, who in his 1971 apostolic letter *Octogesima Adveniens*—written on the occasion of the eightieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, the foundational text of modern Catholic Social Teaching—referred to the ecological crisis as “a tragic consequence” of unchecked human activity: “Due to an ill-considered exploitation of nature, humanity runs the risk of destroying it and becoming in turn a victim of this degradation” (§21). Together with other important teachings of Pope Paul VI, this prophetic warning remained almost completely unheeded. The post-conciliar progressives were then engaged in the “theology of revolution,” a largely Marxist-inspired radical precursor to the subsequent more moderate and more theologically grounded “theology of liberation.” Most post-conciliar progressives dismissed our ecological concerns as a bourgeois and possibly even reactionary strategy of distraction that pulled away attention and energy from the one cause that mattered—the class struggle and the eventual overthrow of global capitalism. That forty years later, the magisterium of the Catholic Church would issue a teaching document of the magnitude, scope, and depth of *Laudato Si* was then utterly unimaginable and beyond the range of our wildest hopes.

Why did I decide to turn to philosophy and theology while most of my friends from the youth group joined the Green Party? They, quite obviously, desired to help transform our local initiatives into national and even global policies of environmental protection and ecological sustainability. While I continued to share these concerns and, as a matter of fact, voted for the Green Party regularly at all elections on the local and on the state level in then West Germany, my primary concern was a different one: I wanted to at least begin to understand the human enigma I had encountered

during the previous years of environmental activism—the deeply troubling phenomenon of human indifference in light of solid evidence and sound arguments, the unwillingness to even consider changing life-styles of wasteful consumption for the sake of the common good, future generations, and the common home, planet earth. I had started out as a naïve young humanist—like so many others—believing people to be good, well-intended, teachable, responsible, and fundamentally rational in the way of ordering their lives. I was, in short, an implicit Socratic, assuming that genuine knowledge—true enlightenment about realities and facts—would lead to enlightened moral and social action. Yet the years of environmental activism taught me a different lesson. I had to revise my naïve premises and begin to think deeper about the human being and eventually also about God. *Nota bene*, I did not need philosophy, theology, Christian social teaching, and even the Christian faith itself, in order to appreciate the fact and grasp the magnitude of the emerging global ecological crisis—now quite articulately confirmed in *Laudato Si*. But I needed philosophy and eventually theology to make sense of my deeply troubling experience and to come to understand the human enigma—the mysterious inability or unwillingness to open up to life-changing realities of large scopes with time-spans encompassing several generations—and in cases where insight into these matters is achieved—the inability or unwillingness to follow up on this newly gained insight with appropriate actions or changes in habits and life patterns. Aristotle’s insight into the weakness of the human will and Augustine’s analysis of the disordered desires and the corruption of the human will were extremely helpful for me, indeed crucial, to begin to understand these puzzling experiences. Eventually, as I continued my studies, I came to realize that in order to understand more fully and more deeply the human enigma, I had to embrace the faith, indeed, eventually the fullness of the Catholic faith—as Augustine states in his treatises on the Gospel of John: *Crede, ut intelligas*, “believe so that you may understand” (*In Iohannis evangelium tractatus* 29.6). And so it was in the light that revelation shed and that faith received that I came to understand the human condition and began to abandon the philosophically rather naïve and theologically quite unsound humanist principles that informed my environmentalism in order eventually to receive my environmental and ecological commitments back as an integral component of a theologically sound and philosophically reflective Christian stewardship of God’s creation.

This said by way of an introduction, I shall now turn to *Laudato Si*. I will show in the following that *Laudato Si* makes its unique contribution to Catholic Social Teaching not because of sundry environmental-policy recommendations but rather because of the theology that sits at its very heart. I will advance my theological reading of *Laudato Si* under the

following headings: First, Doxological Theocentricity. Second, The Mystery of the Father—the Mystery of Primordial Love and Mercy. Third, the World Created by Three Persons Acting as a Single Principle. Remember, every positive statement implies a negation. So also does *Laudato Si*. Emphasizing the theological core—God the Creator and Redeemer, the world as creation, and the human being as created in the image of God and called to adoptive sonship—entails the negation of modern anthropocentrism, of the sovereign subject's will to power, and of its applied metaphysics, the technological paradigm. Hence, fourth, The Corollary of *Laudato Si*'s Doxological Theocentricity—a Radical Critique of Modern Anthropocentrism. Fifth and finally, Technology—Anthropocentric Modernity's Applied Metaphysics, the Sovereign Subject's Will to Power.

Doxological Theocentricity

It is of great significance that *Laudato Si* begins and ends with a doxology—its *incipit*, so to speak, is the opening line of St. Francis's famous canticle: *Laudato Si', mi' Signore*—"Praise be to you, my Lord." The encyclical ends with a doxological prayer to the Triune Lord. This doxological opening and closing is absolutely essential, for the proper praise of the Creator and Redeemer puts the human creature into the right relationship with God, with oneself, with other human beings, and with all of creation. All proper doxology is essentially theo-centric—it begins with God and ends with God, and everything in-between is received from God, rightly ordered to God, and returned to God. Moreover, the praise of God, the Creator and Redeemer, always articulates the double gratuity that characterizes human existence: first, the absolute gratuity of creation itself, its gift-character all the way down, and secondly, the surpassing grace of humanity's calling to adoptive sonship through the Incarnate Lord and to eternal life with God, a grace the capstone of which is the divine self-gift of the Son in the Incarnation. Proper doxology is, as *Laudato Si* teaches by example, always twofold. Hence, to thank and praise God only for creation or only for redemption would be a truncated, a deficient doxology. By entering into the praise of God, the Creator and Redeemer, publicly, visibly, and audibly—under the conditions imposed by modernity's immanent frame—the human being begins to undo the eclipse of God, the eclipse of creation, and the eclipse of humanity as created in the image of God, as redeemed by God.

The Mystery of the Father—the Mystery of Primordial Love and Mercy

Laudato Si's opening and closing doxology points to the very heart of

reality: the Triune God, Creator and Redeemer. Two particular features of the encyclical's way of thematizing this very heart of reality stand out in striking ways:

First: By advancing an immediate, non-problematic witness to the existence of God the Creator, *Laudato Si* implicitly presupposes and simultaneously renews the perennial Catholic teaching that such immediate witness to God's existence is possible, intelligible, and even persuasive because of the generally accessible natural knowledge of God from creation. *Laudato Si* thus re-instates by example the perennial Catholic understanding of Romans 1:19–20: "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" (RSV). The encyclical's immediate theological witness to God the Creator makes perfect sense and is theologically warranted on the supposition that the fundamental parameters given in Romans 1:19–20 still obtain—even under the conditions of the increasing eclipse of God imposed by the immanent frame modern anthropocentrism imposes. *Laudato Si*'s indirect affirmation of the natural knowledge of God from creation—arguably the strongest since the First Vatican Council's *Dei Filius*—is an underappreciated theological aspect of the encyclical letter that calls for closer attention and deeper reflection by Catholic theologians.

The *second* theological feature of *Laudato Si* that stands out in striking ways is the very heart and center of the encyclical—a profound theology of the mystery of God the Father. At a time when Freudianism and Feminism have succeeded in deconstructing and eventually eclipsing divine (let alone human) paternity, *Laudato Si* builds its whole theology of creation and redemption around the "mystery of the Father." Significantly, the encyclical shies away neither from articulating divine paternity nor from emphasizing simultaneously the omnipotence of the Creator. *Laudato Si* states: "A spirituality which forgets God as all-powerful and Creator is not acceptable. That is how we end up worshipping earthly powers, or ourselves usurping the place of God, even to the point of claiming an unlimited right to trample his creation underfoot. The best way to restore men and women to their rightful place, putting an end to their claim to absolute dominion over the earth, is to speak once more of *the figure of a Father who creates and who alone owns the world*. Otherwise, human beings will always try to impose their own laws and interests on reality" (§75; my emphasis).

The other side of *Laudato Si*'s theology of the Father is a radical critique of modern anthropocentrism to which I will turn shortly. At this

moment, however, we need to stay a bit longer with *Laudato Si*'s theology of the Father. The encyclical insists on speaking about this "figure of the Father who creates and alone owns the world." While *Laudato Si* puts the fact that the world is God's and God's alone quite starkly in a way that echoes the Lockean language of individual private ownership of property, a language that most contemporaries would clearly understand because they live by this understanding—this "figure of the Father" is emphatically not a Lockean deity for whom creation might be a commodity to be maintained or annihilated at the deity's will. Rather, the absolute gratuity of creation and more importantly its being created by the Word, by the absolute divine eternal self-communication and self-donation of the Father to the Son "tells us," *Laudato Si* states, "that the world came about as the result of a decision, not from chaos or chance, and this exalts it all the more. The creating word expresses a free choice. The universe did not emerge as the result of arbitrary omnipotence, a show of force or a desire for self-assertion. Creation is of the order of love. God's love is the fundamental moving force in all created things: 'For you love all things that exist, and detest none of the things that you have made; for you would not have made anything if you had hated it' (Wis 11:24)" (§77). Consequently, *Laudato Si* continues, "every creature is . . . the object of the Father's tenderness, who gives it its place in the world. Even the fleeting life of the least of beings is the object of his love, and in its few seconds of existence, God enfolds it with his affection. Saint Basil the Great described the Creator as 'goodness without measure,' while Dante Alighieri spoke of 'the love which moves the sun and the stars.' Consequently, we can ascend from created things 'to the greatness of God and to his loving mercy'" (§77).

The ontology of the gift of being instantiated and undergirded by an even deeper and more primordial Trinitarian order of love is the divine signature underwriting the entire created order. This positive statement entails a negation. Creatures are not simply commodities readily available for the consumption of the vociferous appetite of the modern consumer. Our own status as being created in the image of God, *Laudato Si* insists, "should not make us overlook the fact that each creature has its own purpose. None is superfluous. The entire material universe speaks of God's love, his boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God" (§84). Yet everything, *Laudato Si* emphasizes, is not only, "as it were, a caress of God." Rather, "the universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person's face. The ideal is not only to pass from the exterior to the interior to discover the action of God in the soul, but also to discover God in all things. Saint Bonaventure

teaches us that ‘contemplation deepens the more we feel the working of God’s grace within our hearts, and the better we learn to encounter God in creatures outside ourselves’” (§233).

Is the encyclical losing its theological bearing and beginning to wax poetically? While its theological language stands clearly under the influence of the unique poetry of Franciscan spirituality, *Laudato Si* is theologically very precise in unfolding the implications of a creation *ex nihilo* that is penetrated by the triune order of love all the way down. The encyclical only spells out the full implications of the Christ-centered understanding of the world as creation, commonly shared by Catholics since the first century. This, however, is news—indeed, unwelcome news—to the late modern *homo faber*, technological man, the sovereign subject of production and consumption. The entire material universe does indeed speak of God’s love because—as revelation tells us—it has been created by the Word, the Son, who is the Father’s absolute eternal divine self-communication, united with the Father in the union of love, who is the Holy Spirit. *Laudato Si* makes this unmistakably clear: “In the Christian understanding of the world, the destiny of all creation is bound up with the mystery of Christ, present from the beginning: ‘All things have been created through him and for him’ (Col 1:16). The prologue of the Gospel of John (1:1–18) reveals Christ’s creative work as the Divine Word (*Logos*). But then, unexpectedly, the prologue goes on to say that this same Word ‘became flesh’ (Jn 1:14). One Person of the Trinity entered into the created cosmos, throwing in his lot with it, even to the cross. 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” (§99).

The World Created by Three Persons Acting as a Single Principle

To understand the world fully as God’s creation means to understand the world not simply as the product of some ontologically and chronologically remote first cause but rather as “created by the three Persons acting as a single divine principle, but each one of them performing this common work in accordance with his own personal property. Consequently, ‘when we contemplate with wonder the universe in all its grandeur and beauty, we must praise the whole Trinity’” (§238). This triune pattern penetrates the whole created order. *Laudato Si* states:

“The Father is the ultimate source of everything, the loving and self-communicating foundation of all that exists. The Son, his reflection, through whom all things were created, united himself to this earth when he was formed in the womb of Mary. The Spirit, infinite bond of love, is

intimately present at the very heart of the universe, inspiring and bringing new pathways" (§238).

Quite interestingly—and arrestingly—*Laudato Si* reminds its readers that before the Fall the Trinitarian marks left by the Triune God on creation were clearly to be seen: "For Christians, believing in one God who is trinitarian communion suggests that the Trinity has left its mark on all creation. Saint Bonaventure went so far as to say that human beings, before sin, were able to see how each creature 'testifies that God is three.' The reflection of the Trinity was there to be recognized in nature 'when that book was open to man and our eyes had not yet become darkened.' The Franciscan saint teaches us that *each creature bears in itself a specifically Trinitarian structure*, so real that it could be readily contemplated if only the human gaze were not so partial, dark and fragile. In this way, he points out to us the challenge of trying to read reality in a Trinitarian key" (§239).

Laudato Si does not hesitate to spell out the ontological and anthropological implications of St. Bonaventure's crucial theological insight: "The divine Persons are subsistent relations, and the world, created according to the divine model, is a web of relationships. Creatures tend towards God, and in turn it is proper to every living being to tend towards other things, so that throughout the universe we can find any number of constant and secretly interwoven relationships. This leads us not only to marvel at the manifold connections existing among creatures, but also to discover a key to our own fulfilment. 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" (§240).

The Corollary of *Laudato Si*'s Doxological Theocentricity—a Radical Critique of Modern Anthropocentrism

It is not accidental at all, of course, that *Laudato Si* relies on St. Bonaventure and not on Descartes, Locke, Hume, or Kant for how human beings should understand themselves, other human beings, and the world we live in. For these very thinkers are the intellectual architects of the famous modern turn to the subject, the elevation of the individual to the position of purported subjective sovereignty, and of a mechanistic, proto-technological understanding of the world as a mere terrain available for expansion, subjection, and exploitation. *Laudato Si* registers rather laconically

that “modernity has been marked by an excessive anthropocentrism” (§116). What characterizes this excessive anthropocentrism? *Laudato Si* states: “Modern anthropocentrism has paradoxically ended up prizing technical thought over reality, since ‘the technological mind sees nature as an insensate order, as a cold body of facts, as a mere “given,” as an object of utility, as raw material to be hammered into useful shape; it views the cosmos similarly as a mere “space” into which objects can be thrown with complete indifference.’ The intrinsic dignity of the world is thus compromised. When human beings fail to find their true place in this world, they misunderstand themselves and end up acting against themselves: ‘Not only has God given the earth to man, who must use it with respect for the original good purpose for which it was given, but, man too is God’s gift to man. He must therefore respect the natural and moral structure with which he has been endowed’” (§115).

It is modern anthropocentrism that gives rise to the illusion that the world is just an inexhaustibly self-replenishing mega-oyster technologically prepared for consumption by the natural scientists and their ground personnel, the engineers and other technocrats, economically commodified for consumption by trans-national entrepreneurs and their ground personnel, managers, and marketing and sales specialists and finally consumed interminably by the modern sovereign subject in its related instantiations of shopper, consumer, and tourist. In the mind of the shopper, the consumer, and the tourist, the world is an instrument in service of one ultimate end, self-realization and self-fulfillment. Yet in the mind of God—shared in revelation—the ultimate destiny of the world is strikingly and for the modern sovereign subject jarringly different. *Laudato Si* states: “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. 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. Human beings, endowed with intelligence and love, and drawn by the fullness of Christ, are called to lead all creatures back to their Creator” (§83).

Here *Laudato Si* articulates the vocation of humanity in relation to all other material creatures, to be “a steward of creation,” or to pick up Heidegger’s image from his *Letter on Humanism*, to be a “shepherd of Being” (*Hirte des Seins*), but with a thorough theological correction—the one

true shepherd of Being, being no other than the one “good shepherd,” an image of God the Father who sends his only Son to find the lost sheep. This Christ-like shepherd of Being—embodied maybe most clearly by St. Francis—communicates the love of the Father for all creatures to them, cares for them, and—encompassing them in the sacrifice of thanksgiving and in the doxology of the Triune God—returns them in the Spirit through the Son to the Father. Yet this, quite obviously is not the story and the self-understanding of Enlightenment modernity. By increasingly turning away from this fundamental reality—God, creation, and the human stewardship of creation—and by focusing rather on ourselves, the modern turn to the subject has been instituted—religiously by Luther, philosophically by Descartes, technologically by Bacon, and politically by Rousseau.

As the passage from §115 cited just above makes patent, *Laudato Si* is crystal clear about the fact that the notion that we might “own ourselves” or at least our bodies as instruments of willful self-expression or as tool of sovereign self-realization is nothing but a characteristic expression of the erroneous self-image of the sovereign subject that constitutes modern anthropocentrism’s “heart of darkness.” *Laudato Si* confronts the false self-image of the sovereign subject with the ontology of the gift. “*Man, too, is God’s gift to man.*” Not only is our existence gifted all the way down, but also our natural and moral constitution is gifted. As embodied beings, we participate a natural, sexually differentiated and complementary kind; by way of our intellect and our conscience we participate the eternal law; and as individual persons, supposit, each of us participates the most mysterious of gifts, freedom. Rejecting the gift we are as human persons and the call and responsibility that comes with this gift is to reject the Giver. Accepting the gift is “to accept the natural and moral structure with which [the gift] has been endowed.” It is the sovereign subject that—conceiving itself falsely as self-constituted—is the very rejection of the gift. Transcending nature with the help of technology, the sovereign subject posits the pronouncements of its self-will beyond good and evil, thereby increasingly fluidifying human nature, values, and finally truth itself. This is late-modern anthropocentrism in its tyrannical state. *Laudato Si* puts the matter in plain terms: “The Bible has no place for a tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures” (§68). “Modernity has been marked by an excessive anthropocentrism” (§116) and “the present ecological crisis is one small sign of the ethical, cultural and spiritual crisis of modernity” (§119). It is not the Bible that is out of sync with reality, but rather technologically advanced modernity and its promoter, the sovereign subject.

Technology—Anthropocentric Modernity's Applied Metaphysics, the Sovereign Subject's Will to Power

To expose tyrannical anthropocentrism is not enough for *Laudato Si*. It is important for the encyclical to go one step further and address the very technique by way of which the sovereign subject puts into reality its ever expanding will to power. If the will to power is the counterfeit metaphysics of modernity, technology is its very realization. The encyclical cuts very quickly through the superficial alternatives of being “for” or “against” technology. This binary itself is nothing but the pattern of thought characteristic of technology itself. The basic problem according to *Laudato Si* is “the way that humanity has taken up technology and its development *according to an undifferentiated and one-dimensional paradigm*. This paradigm exalts the concept of a subject who, using logical and rational procedures, progressively approaches and gains control over an external object. This subject makes every effort to establish the scientific and experimental method, *which in itself is already a technique of possession, mastery and transformation. It is as if the subject were to find itself in the presence of something formless, completely open to manipulation*. Men and women have constantly intervened in nature, but for a long time this meant being in tune with and respecting the possibilities offered by the things themselves. It was a matter of receiving what nature itself allowed, as if from its own hand. Now, by contrast, we are the ones to lay our hands on things, attempting to extract everything possible from them while frequently ignoring or forgetting the reality in front of us. Human beings and material objects no longer extend a friendly hand to one another; the relationship has become confrontational. This has made it easy to accept the idea of infinite or unlimited growth, which proves so attractive to economists, financiers and experts in technology. It is based on the lie that there is an infinite supply of the earth's goods, and this leads to the planet being squeezed dry beyond every limit. It is the false notion that ‘an infinite quantity of energy and resources are available, that it is possible to renew them quickly, and that the negative effects of the exploitation of the natural order can be easily absorbed’” (§106; my emphasis).

Besides unmasking the false infinite-supply utopia, the encyclical points out the profound way the one-dimensional paradigm of technology has distorted the human perception of reality:

“It can be said that many problems of today's world stem from the tendency, at times unconscious, to make the method and aims of science and technology an epistemological paradigm which shapes the lives of individuals and the workings of society. The effects of imposing this model

on reality as a whole, human and social, are seen in the deterioration of the environment, but this is just one sign of a reductionism which affects every aspect of human and social life. We have to accept that technological products are not neutral, for they create a framework which ends up conditioning lifestyles and shaping social possibilities along the lines dictated by the interests of certain powerful groups. Decisions which may seem purely instrumental are in reality decisions about the kind of society we want to build" (§107).

The technological paradigm has become the hegemonic counterfeit metaphysics without an emergency exit, as it seems. *Laudato Si* astutely observes: "The idea of promoting a different cultural paradigm and employing technology as a mere instrument is nowadays inconceivable. The technological paradigm has become so dominant that it would be difficult to do without its resources and even more difficult to utilize them without being dominated by their internal logic. It has become counter-cultural to choose a lifestyle whose goals are even partly independent of technology, of its costs and its power to globalize and make us all the same. Technology tends to absorb everything into its ironclad logic, and those who are surrounded with technology 'know full well that it moves forward in the final analysis neither for profit nor for the well-being of the human race,' that 'in the most radical sense of the term power is its motive—a lordship over all.' As a result, 'man seizes hold of the naked elements of both nature and human nature.' Our capacity to make decisions, a more genuine freedom and the space for each one's alternative creativity are diminished" (§108).

The encyclical is not a dystopian neo-Luddism on steroids, but rather a consequent application of the theology and ontology of creation to the presently hegemonic position of the sovereign subject implementing its global will to power by way of its applied counterfeit metaphysics—technology—bent on its own counterfeit eschatology, "lordship over all." This counterfeit eschatology of the sovereign subject is the apocalyptic rejection of the mystery of God the Father, a rejection of his gifts, first the gift of being, creation as a whole and the gift of the human to the human, and secondly, the rejection of the gift of adoptive sonship in the Son of the Father, the Incarnate Lord. The self-constitution as sovereign subject amounts in one to the rejection of paternity as well as of sonship, of the loving Giver and the grateful reception of the gift, and its substitution with sovereign usurpation, lordship over all. *Laudato Si's* theocentric doxology of the mystery of the Father, of the gift of creation, and the mystery of adoptive sonship—unfolding all its theological implications—entails unavoidably the unmasking of its contemporary counterfeit—the

tyrannical anthropocentrism of the sovereign subject. The true doxology and worship of the Lamb, who is the true image of the Father, eventually always unmask the self-worship of the beast, even and especially when it hides in the very heart of the Church herself.

Conclusion

First: Neither the environmental movement nor the United Nations need Catholic Social Teaching for policy development. Policy development is an application of natural law principles and precepts, ordered to the common good, under the guidance of prudence and justice, and in light of the specifically relevant empirical data. All people of good will and proper competency can work together in policy development. The Church has no special competency, and often no competency at all, in policy development. As in the case of *Laudato Si*, the Church might, of course, make recommendations to individuals, communities, whole societies, and even the global community. When these recommendations are overall sound, as I take them to be for the most part in *Laudato Si*, they do not differ substantially from—but rather most often happen to echo—the policy recommendations advanced by most environmental organizations.

Second: As I came to realize retrospectively, the Church does have a surpassing competency, first in teaching explicitly—and thereby enabling human beings to recall—the first and secondary principles and precepts of the natural law, the nature of the common good, and the virtues of prudence and justice. And the Church has, secondly, the surpassing competency to communicate divine revelation—the world as divinely created, the triune identity of the Creator, the precarious state of fallen humanity, and the economy of salvation culminating in the Incarnation of the Son of God. Yet in a modern world dominated increasingly by the immanent frame of the sovereign subject and the correlated technocratic instrumentalization and economic commodification of virtually all reality in service to the sovereign subject and his insatiable desires—in a world haunted by the eclipse of God the Creator, by the eclipse of the world as God's creation, and by the eclipse of the human being as created in the image of God—Catholic Social Teaching can only make sense, and indeed any difference at all, if the immanent frame's threefold eclipse of God, creation, and humanity created in the image of God is explicitly addressed and thereby at least incipiently undone. In short, Catholic Social Teaching in general, and *Laudato Si* in particular, stand on their success as a transparent, consistent, and compelling theological enterprise all the way down or they fall into well-deserved irrelevance. As an ex-post-facto imprimatur

of sound secular policy developments, Catholic Social Teaching is about as useful or necessary as another hole in one's head. As the extension of the revealed truth through sound teaching, persuasive witness, acute argumentation, and effective activism into the social, political, and economic contexts, Catholic Social Teaching as an explicitly and unapologetically *theological enterprise* is absolutely indispensable in a world radically diminished by the threefold eclipse of God, creation, and humanity created in the image of God, imposed by modernity's immanent frame.

Fortunately, *Laudato Si* does not stand in danger of falling into such irrelevance, because the encyclical has a solid theological foundation, and even more importantly, a thorough theocentric orientation that challenges head-on the immanent frame's threefold eclipse. It is for this reason and not for its rather common sense policy recommendations that *Laudato Si* is genuinely good news for its intended audience, that is, "every person living on this planet" (§3).

REV