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# *Quærens*

*Journal of Theology and Pastoral Life*

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# *Quærens*

*Journal of Theology and Pastoral Life*

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*Quaerens* is published twice a year, per school semester, by Recoletos School of Theology, Inc. of the Province of St. Ezekiel Moreno, Order of the Augustinian Recollects (OAR). Its name draws its inspiration from the celebrated Anselmian formula for theology: *fides quaerens intellectum*. The title is also very Augustinian. It calls to mind the constancy of spirit required of every restless heart: “Sic ergo quaesumus tanquam inventuri; et sic inveniamus, tanquam quaesituri” (*De Trin.* IX, 1, i).

As a journal of theology and pastoral life, *Quaerens* is committed to the noble mission of deepening the modern-day Christian’s understanding and praxis of the faith, of fostering an atmosphere of dialogue with cultures and religions throughout the world in general and throughout Asia in particular, and of promoting a scholarly theological discourse that addresses the specific pastoral needs and questions of our time.

The Editors welcome contributions pertinent to theology and pastoral life. The Editorial Board is not responsible for published opinions. It is further to be understood that approval of an article for publication does not necessarily imply endorsement of the views of the author.

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## Editor's Note

For three consecutive years from 2020 to 2022, Quærens published three volumes of *Amor Diffusivus* as a special edition to commemorate the 500 Years of Christianity in the Philippines and the quadricentennial foundation of the Augustinian Recollect Province of Saint Nicolas of Tolentino. For this commemorative series, Emmanuel Luis Romanillos gathered, translated, and edited studies done by Spanish writers and historians.

The present issue of Quærens (volume 18, number 1; July-December 2023), marks the return to the standard edition of the journal. The current volume contains articles which highlight the inconspicuous relevance of the long-revered Augustinian creation theology to the contemporary ecological concerns, the call for a collective commitment to safeguard the earth's well-being, and the advocacy of promoting a just and sustainable world.

In exploring the profound and timeless insights of Saint Augustine on creation, Czar Emmanuel V. Alvarez, OSA seeks to find “their implications for modern environmental conservation and ecology”. Saint Augustine's thoughts on the intrinsic value of the natural world, the human role as stewards of creation, the relationship between God and man, and the existence of change, growth and development in nature, and other current topics are so rich that they can potentially offer effective guiding principles in addressing modern-day environmental and ecological issues.

In dealing with the concept of Anthropocene as articulated in the *Laudato Si'* Encyclical by Pope Francis, Jaazeal Estelou Jakosalem, OAR examines “the implications for the reception of ecological theology within Christian communities”. The article inspires readers to reflect on the challenges and opportunities posed by the Anthropocene and encourages an open dialogue on the ways in which Christian communities may integrate ecological concerns into their theological framework, contributing to a broader conversation on the role of religion in addressing contemporary environmental challenges.

Augustine's discourse on "the book of creatures" highlights his vision of the created world as an "open book" not written with ink and paper, but with living and nonliving tangible realities which do not cease proclaiming and praising the greatness of their maker. Mark Rochelle F. Renacia, OAR expounds this Augustinian vision stressing that the care of creation does not only have a practical and material purpose of satisfying man's need in the present and for the future, but above all, it has sacred value as the beauty of nature invites us to raise our eyes and hearts to the transcendent truth so that we may not remain locked up in the material goods of this earth.

Radni Caparas, OAR posits that the concept of "Recollect Augustinianness" is a counterforce to the pervasive rhetoric of consumerism. The article argues how the said concept deeply rooted in Augustine's philosophy and theology, can offer an alternative perspective on human desires, fulfillment, and the pursuit of a meaningful life in contrast to the unrestrained ethos of consumerism. The readers are then invited to contemplate how the principles of "Recollect Augustinianness" might resonate with and contribute to the ongoing dialogues on responsible consumption, ethical living, and the pursuit of a more sustainable and fulfilling existence.



**Fr. Mark Rochelle F. Renacia, OAR, SThD**

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Vol. 18: No. 1 December (2023)

# Fundamental Insights of Saint Augustine on Creation and Some of their Implications for Modern Environmental Conservation and Ecology

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Fr. Czar Emmanuel V. Alvarez, OSA

## Introduction

Augustine's interpretation of the creation account in the book of Genesis (Gen 1-2) has been a favorite point of reference among researchers interested in environmental and ecological issues. Recently, M. R. Ferraren Renacia conducted a research on it for his 2019 doctoral dissertation.<sup>1</sup> Three years earlier, a series of articles on the same topic was edited by J. Doody, K. Paffenroth and M. Smillie.<sup>2</sup> Earlier still in 1998, E. Horski wrote a paper on the same theme in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Spirituality,<sup>3</sup> and prior to all these, articles on the same topic were published from time to time. We may mention, for example, those published in the *Augustinian*

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Mark Rochelle Ferraren Renacia, "Contemporary Ecology and Augustine on Creation", *Estudios eclesiásticos*, vol. 94, no. 369: 363-402. This was submitted to the Universidad Pontificia Comillas in Madrid, Spain in 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. J. Doody, K. Paffenroth and M. Smillie (eds.), *Augustine and the Environment* (Lanham: Lexington Books 2016).

<sup>3</sup> E. Horski, "Augustine on Environment: Abiding in the Tranquility of Order". *School of Theology and Seminary Graduate Papers/Theses 1171* submitted to the School of Theology of Saint John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota. Cf. [https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/sot\\_papers/1171](https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/sot_papers/1171).



*Studies* (AugStud), like two articles published in 1974 – viz. T. A. Brille’s article “St. Augustine’s Notion of Nothingness in the Light of Some Recent Cosmological Speculation”<sup>4</sup> and J. P. Maher’s article “Saint Augustine and Manichean Cosmogony”.<sup>5</sup> We also have T. van Bavel’s 1986 article “The Creator and the Integrity of Creation”<sup>6</sup> and M.-A. Vannier’s book “*Creatio, Conversio, Formatio*” reviewed by A. Fitzgerald in 1997.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, all these studies show that Augustine has much to say about environmental conservation and ecology.

With the various environmental and ecological crises taking place in different parts of the globe, it is never useless to turn to Augustine to discern principles that may guide experts today in their discernment as to what actions to take to address the ongoing situations affecting nature and all forms of life in it. What would Augustine have to say as regards modern-day environmental and ecological issues? What guiding principles would he provide? To answer these questions, we shall have to take a look into some of his writings concerning creation and the world, man’s role in creation, relationship between God and man, and the existence of change, growth and development in nature (among other things). Such writings would have to be put in their proper historico-cultural context – hence, the importance of considering earlier philosophical speculations about the world, its origin and composition as well as the religious teachings about them that have influenced Augustine’s way of thinking. Our presentation will be expository in character.

### Ancient philosophical thought

Speculations about the world started long before the dawn of Christianity. Ancient Greek philosophers (like the pre-Socratic “Milesians”, the Platonists, the Aristotelians, the Epicureans, the Stoics, *et al.*) had speculated about it. They raised questions about the world’s

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<sup>4</sup> *AugStud* 5 (1974): 15-17.

<sup>5</sup> *AugStud* 10 (1974): 91-101.

<sup>6</sup> *AugStud* 21 (1998): 1-33.

<sup>7</sup> *AugStud* 29 (1997): 151-154. M. Hanby: 83 and 85-86 agrees with M.-A. Vannier in discerning this pattern of “*creatio, conversio, formatio*” in Augustine’s work *De Genesi ad litteram*. Also see C. Harrison, *Beauty and Revelation*: 99-100: “... whereby unformed Creation receives being and form or beauty by conversion to the Supreme Form or Beauty of the Trinitarian God”; cf. *De vera religione* 21.

origin, its eternity or non-eternity, its composition, its goodness or evilness, its relationship with God, and so forth. Let us present some examples of the teachings of ancient Greek thinkers, in this regard.

Greek philosophers from Miletus, collectively called the “Milesians”,<sup>8</sup> active during the seventh and the sixth centuries BC were among the first to speculate about the world and its composition. They all saw the universe as something alive and in motion. They tried to discover the eternal “*Urstoff*” of reality. For Thales, it was water;<sup>9</sup> for Anaximander it was an indefinite and unlimited substance (called ἄπειρον, literally meaning “boundless” or “limitless”<sup>10</sup>) capable of modification into the various forms of matter, while for Anaximenes it was air rarefied into fire or condensed into more concrete substances (like water, earth and stone).<sup>11</sup> Anaxagoras, not a Milesian but a disciple of Anaximenes, thought that it was a divine mind working on an infinite matter.<sup>12</sup>

Next came Ancient Platonism of the fifth and the fourth centuries BC. It did not propose a real cosmology or a physics in the strict sense of the term (even if it had a “natural philosophy”)<sup>13</sup> for it never considered the physical material world as real, but only an imitation of the World of Forms.<sup>14</sup> It was seen as a poor copy of the latter, or a likeness of something permanent or unchangeable.<sup>15</sup> For Platonists, anything changing or becoming did not have a real being.<sup>16</sup> Hence, Physics was seen only as a “likely story” since the world was only a likeness of the real.<sup>17</sup> No cosmology was true.<sup>18</sup> Hence, “there can be no exact, or even

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. N. Smith, F. Allhoff and A. J. Vaidya: 13.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysica* 1.3.983b6-27.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Simplicius, *In Aristotelis De physica Commentarium* 24.13-18.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Theophrastus quoted by Simplicius, *ibid.* 24.26-25.1.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Anaxagoras, *Fragmentum* 12 – one of the fragments collected by H. Diels and W. Kranz; Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 8.2.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 8.4

<sup>14</sup> Cf. R. Kraut: 11. Augustine certainly knew the teachings of Plato about the world as contained in the *Timaeus*. Sometimes he explicitly cites it (cf. *De Trinitate* 4.18.24) and even agrees with Plato (cf. *De civitate Dei* book 8; *Contra Academicos* 3.19.42).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Plato, *Timaeus* 29b.

<sup>16</sup> F. M. Cornford: 24.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. R. Kraut: 12.

<sup>18</sup> T. H. Irwin: 56.

self-consistent, science of Nature”.<sup>19</sup> Things in the physical world were considered as imperfect imitations of Forms (εἶδος) or Ideas created by a Demiurge (δημιουργῶν).<sup>20</sup> Unlike forms or ideas, they were seen as undergoing change and in a constant state of flux, such that one could not step into the same river twice.<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, Plato did speak of a divine principle of order in the cosmos – a First Principle that was absolute, unchanging and true. However, it was an impersonal principle of perfection and not a personal god.<sup>22</sup> Later, Middle Platonism of the first two centuries AD spoke of a pre-existent matter out of which the world was made.<sup>23</sup> We also find this idea in Plato himself.<sup>24</sup> Accordingly, the ideas in the World of Forms constituted the patterns by which things in the physical world were made. The Demiurge created things out of matter using four fundamental elements – viz. fire, air, water and earth.<sup>25</sup> The World Soul was presented as the intermediate between the intelligible and the sensible worlds.<sup>26</sup> Finally, in Neoplatonism of the third century AD, a radical distance was established between matter that constituted the world and the ultimate force that supposedly underlay existence itself. Plotinus called it the One – a wholly transcendent principle, the very ground of existence. He never spoke of creation, but of a series of emanations.<sup>27</sup> The One emanated the Mind, which in turn emanated the World Soul, which was the moving power behind the whole universe.<sup>28</sup> The Soul was the creator of the cosmos.<sup>29</sup> At the lowest level of existence was matter itself, with no direct relationship

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<sup>19</sup> F. M. Cornford: 28.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Plato, *Timaeus* 30a; F. M. Cornford: 27-28, 34ff.

<sup>21</sup> Plato refers here to Heraclitus, cf. *Cratylus* 402a.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. F. M. Cornford: 35-37.

<sup>23</sup> Augustine also entertained the same idea in some of his writings. See footnote below on “*creatio ex nihilo*” under “Religious thought about the world”.

<sup>24</sup> F. M. Cornford: 37.

<sup>25</sup> Plato, *Timaeus* 31b-32c; cf. teachings of Empedocles.

<sup>26</sup> E. Ferguson: 313-314.

<sup>27</sup> Emanation, in this case, is seen as an act of spontaneous “overflowing”, not a deliberate act but “a kind of necessity for the divinity to communicate itself”: T. van Bavel: 7. Augustine, in this regard, underscores the idea that creation was a free and intentional act on God’s part. He created out of love: cf. *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* 1.2.4; *De civitate Dei* 11.21-22; *Contra litteras Petilianus* 2.84.186; *Sermo* 131.2.2; etc.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 10.30.

<sup>29</sup> Porphyry, *Enneades* 2.9.8.

with the One and other higher emanations.<sup>30</sup> In other words, God or the One never mixed with men and the world.<sup>31</sup> From this came the need to speak of “intermediaries” (δαίμονα) between gods and men.<sup>32</sup>

In contrast to Platonic idealism, Aristotelianism of the fourth century BC proposed a “realistic” view of things. Ideas were seen not as independent realities but as something within things themselves. Aristotle rejected Plato’s vision of reality and criticized his predecessor’s inability to distinguish between ideas and the realities they corresponded with<sup>33</sup> because, for Plato, Forms were not mere thoughts or creations of the mind; they were considered as by nature uncreated and their existence was not dependent on being known or thought.<sup>34</sup> Aristotle’s focus was on the composition of things in this world, distinguishing between “substance” (οὐσία) and “accidents” (κατὰ συμβεβηκός), “form” (εἶδος) and “matter” (ὕλη), “act” (actuality: ἐνέργεια) and “potency” (potentiality: δύναμις). He saw change as a fact in reality.<sup>35</sup> For Aristotle, “matter” was the undefined substrate underlying the “form”; it was that out of which things came to be in itself, “matter” was devoid of “form”.<sup>36</sup> Underlying every change the philosopher discerned four types of causes (αἰτία) – viz. material cause, efficient cause, formal cause, and final cause.<sup>37</sup> Everything in nature had an end or purpose.<sup>38</sup> It was seen as moved by a multiplicity of unmoved movers, on the top of which could be found the “prime mover”, not moved by anything outside itself,<sup>39</sup> eternal<sup>40</sup> and immovable.<sup>41</sup> All movement and life were

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<sup>30</sup> E. Ferguson: 368-369; against the usual use of the term “emanation” with reference to Plotinus, cf. T. van Bavel: 23, note 22.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Plato, *Symposium* 203A; Apuleius, *De deo Socratis* 4 and 6; Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 8.18, 8.20, 9.1, 9.12, 9.16, 9.23.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 8.22-23, 9.2, 9.8-9, 9.18.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. J. Barnes: 97.

<sup>34</sup> R. Kraut: 7.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Physica* 3.1.200b.1ff.: “nature is a principle of motion or of change”.

<sup>36</sup> A. A. Long: 154.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Physica* 2.3; 2.7; *Metaphysica* 7.8.1033b29ff.; R. J. Hankinson: 121-122.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Physica* 2.8.199a.30.

<sup>39</sup> Aristotle, *Physica* 6.258.30-6.259a.1ff.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* 6.259b.32.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* 6.258b.31.

seen as ultimately dependent upon the Unmoved Mover, the pure Mind or God.<sup>42</sup> Note, however, that, like Plato, Aristotle never spoke of the “prime mover” as a personal god.<sup>43</sup> His “god” was a part of the structure of reality, not outside it or its cause or creator.<sup>44</sup>

Epicureanism of the fourth century BC, on the other hand, held a purely materialistic view of reality, teaching that the whole nature was made of matter and space or “body and void” as Epicurus puts it<sup>45</sup> and that atoms or “atomic kinds of bodies”<sup>46</sup> were the building blocks out of which the world was made.<sup>47</sup> They were in themselves deprived of properties, “for all quality changes, but the atoms do not change at all”.<sup>48</sup> Atoms were thought to be neither created nor destroyed.<sup>49</sup> They were eternal and they “moved continuously forever”<sup>50</sup> “of equal velocity”.<sup>51</sup> Together with space or “void”, they were supposed to constitute the whole of the universe. Like space itself, atoms were thought to be infinite.<sup>52</sup> The physical world came from indestructible atoms and, hence, was seen as eternal. Everything in nature was made of atoms, even the soul itself. When a person died, the atoms composing his body and soul simply disintegrated, but not destroyed.<sup>53</sup> As to the relationship between the world and the gods, Epicureans believed that gods did exist, but they supposedly never interfered in nature and in human affairs.<sup>54</sup> Thus, providence was denied. The gods dwelt in the interstellar spaces completely outside the world and had no contact with it. They “dwell in *sedes quietae* (‘tranquil resting places’) enjoying a life free of all

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<sup>42</sup> A. A. Long: 43, 152.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. T. van Bavel: 5.

<sup>44</sup> E. Ferguson: 318-320; R. J. Hankinson: 127; however, A. A. Long: 152 states otherwise.

<sup>45</sup> Epicurus, *Epistula ad Herodotum* 39.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* 4.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. teachings of Leucippus, Democritus and Lucretius, who used the term “*primordia*” for “*atomoi*”: cf. Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 1.55.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* 1.54; Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos* 7.135; cf. A. A. Long: 38.

<sup>49</sup> Epicurus, *Epistula ad Herodotum* 54.

<sup>50</sup> *Epistula ad Herodotum* 43-44; cf. A. A. Long: 35.

<sup>51</sup> *Epistula ad Herodotum* 61.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* 41.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 64-65.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. T. van Bavel: 5; T. H. Irwin: 52; A. A. Long: 41, 44.

trouble”.<sup>55</sup> In this way, men should not fear them. Such freedom from the “fear of divine powers” was presented as the source of peace of mind and tranquility (ἀταραξία) for all.<sup>56</sup> Lastly, Epicureans did not believe in future punishment and upheld the idea that death should not be feared, for according to them: “When we are, death is not come; and when death is come, we are not. It is nothing, then, either to the living or to the dead, for with the living it is not and the dead exist no longer”.<sup>57</sup> “The fear of Acheron<sup>58</sup> must be thrown violently out the door. This fear throws human life into deep and utter confusion, straining everything with the black darkness of death”.<sup>59</sup>

Stoicism of the fourth and the third centuries BC also espoused a materialistic view of the world. God (seen not as a personal being but as an immanent principle) and the world were seen as material. Matter that composed all things that existed was of two basic types – the grosser matter and the finer matter (called “breath” or “spirit”) – and it was diffused throughout reality. In the case of man, the grosser matter composed his physical body, while the finer matter composed his soul. God and the world shared the same material nature. “God is mixed with matter, penetrates the whole matter and shapes it”.<sup>60</sup> God was supposed to bind “matter together like glue”.<sup>61</sup> God was identified with the creative rational “*pneuma*” (πνεῦμα) that was thought to interact with matter by permeating it completely<sup>62</sup> – hence, Stoicism was considered as a “pantheistic” system: the divine reality was to be found in everything.<sup>63</sup> Sometimes God is also described as “the seminal reason of the universe ... an agent adapting matter to himself with a view to the next

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<sup>55</sup> Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 3.18-24.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Epicurus, *Epistula ad Menoeceum* (trans. N. Smith, F. Allhoff and A. J. Vaidya: 316-318); A. A. Long: 40-43.

<sup>57</sup> Epicurus, *Epistula ad Menoeceum*, ibid. 316; cf. Epicurus, *Kuriai Doxai* or *Principal Doctrines* 1; Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 3.830; E. Ferguson: 350-352; A. A. Long: 42.

<sup>58</sup> According to mythology, this is the river in Hades that all souls must cross after death.

<sup>59</sup> Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 3.35-39; cf. A. A. Long: 43.

<sup>60</sup> *SVF* 2.310.

<sup>61</sup> J. Rist: 204.

<sup>62</sup> *SVF* 2.473; Seneca, *Epistulae morales* 65.12; cf. A. A. Long: 161.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. A. A. Long: 150.

stage of creation”.<sup>64</sup> “The Stoic philosophy of nature is an attempt to provide a rational explanation for all things in terms of the intelligent activity of a single entity which is coextensive with the universe”.<sup>65</sup> All parts of the universe were interconnected. Hence, what happened in one place affected what happened elsewhere. Compared with the Epicureans, the Stoics believed in the rationality of the entire universe.<sup>66</sup> The existence of a pervading rational principle governing the universe was affirmed.<sup>67</sup> It governed the balance, stability and order in nature. All existent things were thought to exhibit such single substance in various conditions.<sup>68</sup> Sometimes it was identified with the principle of a “creative fire” (πυρ τεχνικόν) underlying the endless and cyclic process of conflagration (ἐκπύρωσις) and regeneration (παλιγγενέσια).<sup>69</sup> Hence, at the end of each cycle, the universe would be dissolved into the divine fire. Sometimes this idea was identified with Providence.<sup>70</sup> Later Stoicism, like that developed by Panaetius in the second century BC, gave up the idea of a world conflagration and accepted instead the idea of the eternity of the world. Much later still, the idea that the universe was the product of divine Providence was stressed (as in the teachings of Epictetus during the first and the second centuries AD). The world’s order and unity were supposed to be manifestations of such Providence.<sup>71</sup>

Our brief survey of ancient Greek thought about the world demonstrates how philosophers’ way of looking at reality swung from one extreme to the other. The world was either seen as unreal or a mere copy or imitation of the real world (like Plato’s World of Forms), or as real and made of concrete matter (like atoms), as Epicureanism taught. It was also seen either as eternal in itself, with its continuous cycle of destruction and regeneration (like the Stoic cycle of conflagration and regeneration), or as temporal and subject to permanent disintegration. As to the world’s composition, while ancient Greek thinkers believed

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<sup>64</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae philosophorum* 2.136.

<sup>65</sup> A. A. Long: 168.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 148.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* 150.

<sup>68</sup> J. Rist: 204.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. *SVF* 2.1132ff.; Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 8.5 and 12.14; A. A. Long: 155, note 2; 168; W. A. Christian: 325.

<sup>70</sup> E. Ferguson: 335-336, 338.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* 339, 344.

that there was a fundamental substratum underlying reality, they proposed different theories about it. The pre-Socratics argued that it could be water, air, fire, etc. The relationship between the world and God was also seen in many ways, just as the idea of “god” itself changed. Hence, some speak of God as made of matter (atoms) and as sharing the same composition of the rest of reality or as an integral part of it (pantheism), or sometimes God is presented as totally other-worldly, transcendent and detached from the universe and as having nothing to do with it (like the Plotinian “the One”).

### Religious thought about the world

On the more religious side, the Jewish and the Christian faiths provided pagan cosmological speculation with a particular direction or orientation. Aside from asserting that the world and everything it contained were created by a personal God,<sup>72</sup> they likewise upheld the idea of “*creatio ex nihilo*”<sup>73</sup> – hence, apparently denying the eternity of

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<sup>72</sup> Cf. T. van Bavel: 10.

<sup>73</sup> Augustine defended and expounded on this mostly against the Manichean cosmology: cf. C. Harrison, *Beauty and Revelation*: 99. In another article – *Rethinking Augustine’s Early Theology*: 74ff., – C. Harrison traces the origin and various cultural influences on Augustine that gradually led him to accept the idea of “*creatio ex nihilo*”, discussing particularly Manicheism, Neoplatonism, Ambrose, study of the Sacred Scripture, etc. before his conversion. She also explains why such idea was already present even in the early works of Augustine (like in his *Soliloquia*) and how it was intricately connected to his understanding of evil as “privation”, God as a transcendent being, human free will and Fall, grace, beauty and form, and so forth.

For M. Handby: 83, the relationship between God’s simplicity, immutability and His being transcendental, on the one hand, and the created world’s complexity and changeability, on the other hand, remains “paradoxical” and, at most, beyond human comprehension – “a mystery in the most profound sense”: *ibid.* 84; cf. W. A. Christian: 323 and 327. Cf. Augustine, *Confessiones* 12.6 and *De vera religione* 20.40. However, there are instances where the African bishop seems to accept the existence of a primordial matter (ὕλη), formless in itself and yet capable of receiving form (*capacitas formae*), out of which things were made (cf. *De natura boni* 18 and *Confessiones* 12.6.6; W. A. Christian: 329). M. Hanby: 86 interprets this not to mean that such *hyle* existed independently of God prior to the act of creation, but that it only had some “intentional” existence in God’s mind. Hence, “there was no interval of time between this *hyle* and its acquisition of form, which forbids thinking of a formless *hyle* existing prior to its being informed”. E. TeSelle: 31 sees the influence of Plotinus on Augustine, in this case – something which the former, for his part, learned from Aristotle. Also see V. J. Bourke: 226 and W. A. Christian: 329 on the existence of “unformed matter” and how



the world – and of divine Providence. God supposedly keeps things in a state of existence. Without God, they would return to “nothingness”. God is also presented as intervening in both the world and human affairs and not a distant indifferent Supreme Being as some Greek philosophers asserted. Now, while the Jewish and the Christian religions set a clear direction for speculation about the world and its relationship with God, this did not prevent some groups from advancing interpretations and doctrines which the Christian church later considered as “heretical”.

The Gnostics of the second century posed a serious threat to Christians during the early centuries,<sup>74</sup> teaching that the material world or everything made of matter was intrinsically evil and attributing the origin of the present world to an evil Demiurge.<sup>75</sup> They also undermined the Christian teaching about the salvation of man’s physical body, asserting that only the soul could be saved. Likewise, Marcion spoke of two gods – a good one and an evil one – considering the Creator spoken of in the Old Testament as an evil god in contrast to the good god of the New Testament.<sup>76</sup> He eventually rejected the entire Old Testament.<sup>77</sup>

The Manicheans followed the same thinking of the Gnostics. They saw matter (particularly man’s physical body), which they equated with the “principle of darkness”, as evil in itself,<sup>78</sup> and admitted the

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both matter and form were created at once, with no interval of time (cf. *Confessiones* 13.33.48). Bourke also holds that “unformed matter is not prior to forms chronologically. The only priority is a logical one.... Unformed matter was not created before the existence of the various species of natural things”: *ibid.* 227-228; cf. *De Genesi ad litteram* 2.11.24; *Confessiones* 13.33.48; *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* 1.6.10; and C. Harrison, *Beauty and Revelation*: 99. As to the inability of ancient Greek philosophers to think of creation out of nothingness, cf. T. van Bavel: 4 (who also points out that, among Christian authors, Justin Martyr, Athenagoras and Clement of Alexandria were the first to adopt the idea of an “eternal matter”, while the Gnostic Basilides was the first to make an explicit affirmation of “*creatio ex nihilo*”).

<sup>74</sup> Cf. T. van Bavel: 2-4.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* 2-3; cf. C. Harrison, *Rethinking*: 75. T. van Bavel: 2. Same teaching attributed by Augustine to Neoplatonism: cf. *De civitate Dei* 10.23. In his *Timaeus* 30a, Plato speaks of creator “god” – sc. a Demiurge – bringing things “from disorder into order”.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. R. J. Teske: 166-168.

<sup>77</sup> T. van Bavel: 3. The Manicheans also attacked the Old Testament – cf. T. K. Scott: 81.

<sup>78</sup> Augustine, *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum* 2.2.

possibility of salvation only for the soul. For them, the whole history of the universe is presented as a story of invasions and uprisings, a constant battle between the forces of Light and of Darkness.<sup>79</sup> The Fathers of the Church entered into full polemics with the Gnostics and the Manicheans to refute their teachings, as well as those of ancient Greek philosophers that seemed to them as irreconcilable with the teachings of the Church. Among the most prominent anti-gnostic Christian writers we have Irenaeus of Lyons, Hippolytus of Rome, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen, while among those who engaged in anti-Manichean polemics we are particularly interested in Augustine of Hippo.

The common battle ground for both the Fathers of the Church and the heretics of the early centuries was the Sacred Scripture. The book of Genesis, specifically its creation accounts (Gen 1:1-2:4 and Gen 2:5-25), was of particular interest to both groups. This holds true especially in the late Hellenistic Judaism, beginning with Philo of Alexandria. On the part of Christian thinkers, on the other hand, interest in the book of Genesis seems to have started in the second century AD, particularly in the context of the anti-gnostic polemics. The very first Christian commentary on it was written by Theophilus of Antioch.<sup>80</sup> He was also the first one to offer arguments for the idea of “creation out of nothing” or “*creatio ex nihilo*”.<sup>81</sup> The Fathers of the Church used both Jewish and Christian sources in their commentaries on the said book.<sup>82</sup>

## Augustine and Manichaeism

Augustine dedicated a considerable amount of his time and energy combatting the teachings of the Manicheans, with whom he was associated for more than ten years as a “hearer” (*auditor*). The Manicheans helped him go through college;<sup>83</sup> they supported him

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<sup>79</sup> Cf. Gnostic text Kephalaion 38 in W. Barnstone and M. Meyer: 624-631; on background about this text. Also see J. P. Maher: 93-94. Augustine also speaks about this – cf. *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum* 3.5; 12.27; *Contra epistolam Manichaei quam vocant Fundamenti* 12.15-13.16; 15.19; 19.21-22.23; 28.31.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolychum* 2.10-32; B. Studer: 827; T. van Bavel: 4.

<sup>81</sup> T. van Bavel: 4.

<sup>82</sup> G. Pelland in *DPAC*, vol. 2: 1443.

<sup>83</sup> Augustine, *Contra Academicos* 2.2.3.

materially as a student in Carthage and even for nine years while he was teaching rhetoric in Carthage;<sup>84</sup> he was still associated with the Manichean sect during his brief stay in Rome (383-384). However, at a certain point he decided to dissociate himself from the group and a few years later he started writing against their teachings and traditions.

Manichean teachings are seen as closely associated with Gnosticism.<sup>85</sup> Some even consider it as “the most radical offshoot of Gnosticism”.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, there are many similarities between the two (for example, in the way both consider matter as intrinsically evil, in the way both look at creation or the origin of the world, in the way they talk about eons, and so forth).<sup>87</sup> Of direct interest to our present article is the way the Manicheans talked about the origin of the world, man’s role in it, whether creation was good or bad, and providence.

Saint Augustine commented rather extensively on the book of Genesis in, at least, five of his writings – viz. the *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* (388/9-390),<sup>88</sup> the *De Genesi ad litteram liber imperfectus* (393), the *De Genesi ad litteram* (399-415), some books from the *Confessiones* (books 11-13, written from 397 to 401) and from the *De civitate Dei* (books 11-12, written sometime from 413 to 427).<sup>89</sup> These works were the focus of Marie-Anne Vannier’s 1990 doctoral dissertation in Philosophy at the Sorbonne in Paris.<sup>90</sup> Others also speak of what they describe as Augustine’s “Pentateuch against the Manicheans”<sup>91</sup> (or at

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<sup>84</sup> Augustine, *Confessiones* 4.2.2; *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum* 19.68.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. W. Barnstone and M. Meyer 589.

<sup>86</sup> T. van Bavel: 3.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Gnostic text *Kephalaion* 38 in W. Barnstone and M. Meyer: 624 and 630. Also see W. A. Christian: 333-335. For a detailed account of the Manichean myth of creation – cf. T. K. Scott: 78-79. Two types of Manicheism have been identified by some scholars – cf. P. Brown: 54-55.

<sup>88</sup> This is also known as *De Genesi adversus Manichaeos* and constitutes Augustine’s very first attempt at biblical exegesis. It was written in 388-389 before his priestly ordination. The influence of Neoplatonism is quite evident in this work.

<sup>89</sup> The number of works Augustine dedicated to the book of Genesis demonstrates his extensive interest in the theme of creation, as V. J. Bourke: 224 observes. However, his *De Genesi ad litteram*, while not being his first exegetical work, “constitutes Augustine’s greatest effort to understand the details of the production of the world by divine creation”: *ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Cf. its review in *AugStud* 29.2 (1997): 151-154.

<sup>91</sup> J. P. Maher: 91.

least some parts of these) that include his *De libero arbitrio* (387-388), *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum* (387-389), and *De vera religione* (390). Augustine's writings, in this case, were the product mostly of his anti-Manichean polemics. However, from time to time he does make reference to some ideas of ancient Greek thinkers. Let's take a look at some of the important insights contained in his works.

### Goodness of creation

Not only ancient Greek philosophers, but also early Christian writers have taken opposite stands on whether creation, or the world specifically, was intrinsically good or evil. Augustine's thought, in this regard, was more directly influenced by the Manichean teachings, which in turn reveal very strong Gnostic tones. As we have mentioned earlier, both Gnosticism and Manicheism looked as everything made of matter as evil in itself, particularly the physical word and man's physical body. They were seen as results of spiritual beings' degradation, a "fall" from the Kingdom of Light, an "abortion" from the Pleroma, an imprisonment of elements of light. In his *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, Augustine directly addresses this question.<sup>92</sup> In line with his interpretation of the first creation account in the book of Genesis, he underscores the idea that everything created by God was good (cf. Gen 1:4.10.12.18.21.25). In fact, the whole creation was "very good" (Gen 1:31). He repeats the same idea in *De Genesi ad litteram*.<sup>93</sup>

As to what makes creation good, Augustine explains that everything is good because it has been created according to a certain measure, number and order (cf. Ws 11:20). In *De Genesis ad litteram* he explains what measure, number and order mean.<sup>94</sup> Measure (*mensura*) refers to the intrinsic limitations of created things as to their range of possibilities. Number (*numerus*), on the other hand, indicates their potentialities,<sup>95</sup> which include their ability to adjust to situations or

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<sup>92</sup> *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* 1.21.32.

<sup>93</sup> *De Genesi ad litteram* 3.24-36-37.

<sup>94</sup> *De Genesi ad litteram* 4.3.7-8; cf. R. Williams: 252. Sometimes Augustine prefers to use the terms "*modus*", "*species*" and "*ordo*": C. Harrison, *Beauty and Revelation*: 101 and note 27. For a more elaborate discussion on these three properties, cf. C. Harrison, *ibid.* 103-110.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. *De Genesi ad litteram*. 5.23.44.

circumstances or “*quod tempori congruat*”.<sup>96</sup> Sometimes it is taken to indicate the form and harmony or proportion of things. Lastly we have order (*ordo*), which sometimes is also called “weight” (*pondus*), referring to things’ natural movement or tendency towards a particular end or goal. We read: “... measure sets a limit to everything, and number gives everything its specific form, and weight draws everything to rest and stability”.<sup>97</sup> When these three things are completely taken away, nothing at all remains. But wherever they are present, perfect form exists.<sup>98</sup> Augustine also sees these three intrinsic characteristics of creation as reflections of divine attributes. All of them can be found in God himself since he is the “true and unique measure which defines for all things their bounds, the number which forms all things, the weight which guides all things.”<sup>99</sup>

To further elaborate on the idea of measure, number and order, Augustine uses the analogy of the human body.<sup>100</sup> He says that, just like in creation, looking at the individual parts of the human body may not readily reveal beauty. However, contemplating the human body in its totality makes its beauty become evident. Only then can we see the proportion of parts, their harmony and interconnectedness. Things are more beautiful in their totality than in their individual parts (like the human body composed of parts or a speech composed of distinct syllables, words and letters).<sup>101</sup> In other words, goodness comes from unity among parts and from completeness or how things constitute the whole. In this regard, Augustine even says that the word “universe” comes from “unity”.<sup>102</sup>

Measure, number and weight can also be seen in human actions. We see measure in the way man does things within certain limits, avoiding excesses; number in the way a person’s passion and powers are pulled together; and weight corresponding with a person’s will and love. On a higher level, we also see beauty and harmony in the way men act collectively. Augustine writes: “... while someone who is good as

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<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.* 6.14.25.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.* 4.3.7-8.

<sup>98</sup> C. Harrison, *Beauty and Revelation*: 102.

<sup>99</sup> *De Genesi ad litteram* 4.3.7-8.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 3.24.36-37.

<sup>101</sup> *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* 1.21.32.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

an individual is clearly better when taken together with all the others, it does not follow that when he is good taken together with all the others he must also be good as an individual ... so that even if things individually become deformed by transgressing, nonetheless the totality together with them in it remains beautiful”.<sup>103</sup>

### Idea of divine providence

Another point that Augustine addresses is the relationship between God and creation. We have seen that some ancient Greek thinkers denied any relationship between the two. God was sometimes depicted as not responsible for creation itself, which was rather attributed to an inferior being (like the Platonic “Demiurge”) or to a secondary “emanation” (like the Plotinian “World Soul”). God was presented as totally transcendental and beyond the world, with no contact whatsoever with it and everything in it (including man). Epicureans stressed this. Thus, the world was left on its own, with its own internal governing rules to follow, some inherent “*rationes*” (as the Stoics called them). In this way, providence or any divine intervention in creation, was denied.<sup>104</sup> This, of course, is different from the Stoic understanding of “providence” – a rational principle internal to creation itself, underlying the endless and cyclic process of destruction and rebirth of all things.

Again in *De Genesi ad litteram*,<sup>105</sup> Augustine discusses what providence is all about. Providence is defined as “the secret action of God at work in Creation”.<sup>106</sup> Specifically, it refers to how God continues

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<sup>103</sup> *De Genesi ad litteram* 3.24.36-37.

<sup>104</sup> This point remains somewhat problematic for Augustine. E. TeSelle: 30 underscores the role of angels, in this case: “since God is not an agent in time and space, it is the angels who carry out providence”. Hence, while the idea that God must continue to keep things in a state of existence, ontologically speaking, is clear, how he exactly governs their activities in time and space is not really explained. As to their growth and development in time and space, Augustine introduces the idea of “seminal reasons” (as we shall explain later).

<sup>105</sup> *De Genesi ad litteram* 4.12.22-23.

<sup>106</sup> C. Harrison, *Beauty and Revelation*: 127. Sometimes a distinction is made between two types of providence, in this case – viz. corporeal and exterior, on the one hand, and incorporeal and interior, on the other hand: *ibid*. While both types can be seen at work in corporeal creation, purely spiritual beings are governed only by the second type.

to manage and keep in existence the things that he had created, otherwise they would “collapse into nothingness”.<sup>107</sup> Hence, even if the Bible says that he rested on the seventh day (cf. Gen 2:2-3), God actually continues to work.<sup>108</sup> The idea of providence implies that God is not totally detached from His creation. He rather has a continuous relationship with it.<sup>109</sup> He is not complacently resting in the interstellar spaces, completely outside the world and not having any contact with it (as the Epicureans claimed).

The idea of providence “was a guiding thread that ran through Augustine’s life and literary production”.<sup>110</sup> He refuted the Epicurean, Stoic and Neoplatonic teachings about it. In one of his earlier works, the *De ordine*, he already raised the question of “whether the order of divine providence embraces all things, evil as well as good”.<sup>111</sup> He concluded that the entire cosmos was ordered and governed by a personal transcendent Being, the “*divina potentia et moderatio ... secretissimum majestatis arbitrium*”. One specific way in which we see the working of the divine providence in the creation is in the existence of “form” in every created reality. It is such “form” that keeps a thing in a state of existence. The fact that things exist and continue to possess their respective “forms” demonstrates not only God’s existence, but also how he keeps changeable “forms” in existence. The moment a reality loses its “form”, it ceases to exist. Therefore, as long as things continue to exist, it means that God continues to keep them in a state of existence. Augustine presents this argument in his *De libero arbitrio*.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Cf. *De Genesi ad litteram* 4.20.41. Indeed, given the natural limitations of creatures, they seem to have “an inherent propensity to slip back into nothingness”: T. A. Burkill: 15. Augustine’s teachings in this case has been compared to Nicolas Léonard Carnot’s second law of thermodynamics. However, significant differences have been noticed (like when comparing Augustine’s idea of nothingness with the concept of thermodynamic equilibrium): *ibid.* 17.

<sup>108</sup> V. J. Bourke: 231. Distinguishing between two “moments” in creation, Bourke explains how, in the second “moment”, God continues to govern the things that He had created.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. *De civitate Dei* 11.5, while in his *In Johannis evangelium* 2.10 Augustine says that God “does not withdraw” and that “by his presence he governs what he made”.

<sup>110</sup> V. Pacioni: 686.

<sup>111</sup> Augustine, *Retractationes* 1.3.

<sup>112</sup> *De libero arbitrio* 2.17.45.

God's way of governing the things He created can also be seen in the way things grow and develop,<sup>113</sup> or in the way things seem to disappear from space and time to give way to apparently new things.<sup>114</sup> Created realities follow certain laws or series of causes when they do so. There are "intrinsic laws according to which a being in the process of formation develops".<sup>115</sup> For Augustine, "there is nothing for him (*sc.* God) still to create in the series of times which had not already been created by him here in the series of causes, while we take him to have started in that he here fixed the causes which he would put into effect later on".<sup>116</sup> The key term in this text is "causes" that are said to have been "fixed" and are somewhat activated or enter into operation in predetermined time and space. We take this to indicate, among other things, the laws that govern everything in the world including life itself. There is a certain pattern in the way things come into being, grow, develop, die or seem to change into something else. In other words, for Augustine, nothing happens by chance or escapes God's control.

The belief in the existence of laws governing the world can be traced back to ancient Greek thinkers. Plato affirmed it and saw it clearly manifested in the way heavenly bodies move in a particular order.<sup>117</sup> Epicureans, on the other hand, vehemently denied it<sup>118</sup> since they considered it as the cause of human anxiety.<sup>119</sup> As for Augustine, their existence was part of divine providence and could explain the "ongoing creation".

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<sup>113</sup> Measure (*mensura*), number (*numerus*) and weight (*pondus*), which we have mentioned earlier, are described not only as properties that give form to existing things, but also as their very source of growth and development. Thus, they are sometimes equated with the "seminal reasons" present in all things: cf. Augustine, *De Trinitate* 3.9.16; C. Harrison, *Beauty and Revelation*: 102.

<sup>114</sup> In his *Epistula ad Caelestinum* 18.2 (written around the year 300), Augustine distinguishes between three levels of reality or types of being – viz. beings subject to mutation as to time and space (like material bodies), beings subject to change only as regards time (like the souls), and beings not subject to change as regards both time and space (like God himself). The first two types refer to created beings. It is in this context that we must understand Augustine's discourse about "*rationes seminales*": cf. V. J. Bourke: 225.

<sup>115</sup> T. van Bavel: 11.

<sup>116</sup> *De Genesi ad litteram* 6.11.19.

<sup>117</sup> Cf. Plato, *Timaeus* 47b-c; A. A. Long: 42-43.

<sup>118</sup> Cf. Epicurus, *Epistula ad Herodotum* 76-77.

<sup>119</sup> A. A. Long: 43.



Divine providence can be seen not only in things taken either individually or collectively or in human life and action, but also in the general movement of history. Things unfold in time and space according to a certain “*dispensatio*”. In his famous work, the *De civitate Dei*, Augustine presents the general movement of history towards its final end as propelled by two fundamental motors – *amor sui* (self-love) and *amor Dei* (love of God).<sup>120</sup>

### **Man given dominion over the rest of creation**

Augustine talks about creation not only to demonstrate its origin and the relationship between existing realities and God, but also to underscore man’s special place in creation and his responsibility towards it. Special focus of interpretation, in this case, is the biblical verse Gen 1:28 (“God blessed them – *sc.* Adam and Eve – and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground’”). Christian tradition has always interpreted this verse as indicating, among other things, man’s dominion over creation.<sup>121</sup> However, the way of how man should exercise such dominion has been interpreted in many ways.<sup>122</sup> Should such dominion be interpreted in an absolute sense, or are there limitations to it?

The biblical account presents man as the culmination of God’s creation. Man’s dominion over the rest of creation is expressed not only through the explicit order given to him by God (as indicated in Gen

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<sup>120</sup> Cf. Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, particularly book 18. W. A. Christian: 326 notes how for Augustine, “Historical time therefore proceeds not in circles but in a straight line. It proceeds in a straight line because it has a ‘beginning,’ as a circle does not”. This was Augustine’s way of refuting the Stoic view of history that sees everything as ceaselessly recurring in cycles of events or “innumerable ages” that repeat themselves – cf. *De civitate Dei* 12.14.

<sup>121</sup> Augustine interprets this verse not only with reference to man’s dominion over something outside himself, but also as regards his ruling over the affections and emotions of his soul: cf. R. J. Teske: 186.

<sup>122</sup> L. White, Jr.’s controversial 1967 article (see References) suggests that the Christian interpretation of this verse was behind the abusive use of technology on man’s part that started during the mediaeval period. Such interpretation would have created a particular attitude on the part of Christians that saw creation as serving no other purpose but to serve man’s needs. Consequently, this resulted in the exploitation of nature and all its resources.

1:28), but also in the symbolic gesture of giving names to animals in the Garden of Eden (cf. Gen 2:19-20). However, along with such dominion the Bible also explicitly states that man is supposed to cultivate and take care of the garden (cf. Gen 2:15). Commenting on this, Augustine first distinguishes between two types of work that can be seen in the universe: (a) work as a natural activity attributable to divine providence, that gives growth to trees and herb, etc., and (b) work as a voluntary activity attributable to angels and human beings.<sup>123</sup> The type of work that God ordered man to carry out clearly refers to the latter type. To accomplish it, God endowed man with certain capacities, beginning with “rational facility to work as much as would satisfy its willing spirit”.<sup>124</sup> It also requires teaching and learning, arts and skills.<sup>125</sup> While the biblical account does not speak of how Adam and Eve in Paradise learned or were trained how to work or cultivate and take care of the garden – indeed, it seems that they had to simply pick fruits from the trees and eat them (cf. Gen 2:16; 1:29) or at most to keep God’s commandment,<sup>126</sup> it is implicit that they had to work in one way or another and learn how to do it. Augustine also points out that both types of work – natural and voluntary – can be observed in man himself. Thus, his body grows, develops, ages, and so on, while the provision of food, clothing, shelter, etc. come from man’s voluntary activities.<sup>127</sup>

A further distinction is made between man’s work before the Fall (i.e. commission of “original sin”) and after the Fall. In the former case, the African bishop says that man was put to work in Paradise not as a punishment (since he had not yet committed any sin yet), but as an expression of “pure exhilaration” (as farmers till the fields with pleasure).<sup>128</sup> Work then was not a stressful “wearisome toil” (*laboriosa non erat*) since everything God created flourished in more luxuriant abundance. “Man was set up in Paradise to work at agriculture, not in servile toil, but with genuine pleasure and uplift of spirit”.<sup>129</sup> The

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<sup>123</sup> Cf. *De Genesi ad litteram* 8.9.17.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.* 8.8.15. cf. *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* 1.17.27-28.

<sup>125</sup> Cf. *De Genesi ad litteram* 8.9.17. cf. R. J. Teske: 191.

<sup>126</sup> cf. *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* 2.11.15.

<sup>127</sup> *De Genesi ad litteram* 8.9.17.

<sup>128</sup> Cf. T. van Bavel: 11; R. J. Teske: 192.

<sup>129</sup> *De Genesi ad litteram* 8.9.17; same idea repeated in 8.10.22. R. J. Teske: 192 notes, in this case, a striking similarity between Augustine’s interpretation and what Plotinus says in *Enneades* 5.8.4. R. J. O’Connell: 9 observes the same thing here as well as in other instances (like between *Enneades* 4.3.18 and *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* 2.4.5, 2.20.30 and 2.21.32).

situation changed after the Fall. Work became burdensome and oppressive and started to entail hardship. God cursed the ground, commanding it to yield thorns and thistles. Man, for his part, had to engage in painful toil all the days of his life and produce from the sweat of his brow (cf. Gen 3:17-19).

As to Gen 2:15, Augustine interprets the command to guard and take care of Paradise in the sense that while man was given dominion over the rest of creation, he is expected to recognize the limitations of his actions so as “not to allow anything there which would earn him expulsion from it (*sc.* Paradise)” or to “avoid being thrown out of it”.<sup>130</sup> It is an implicit recognition of God as the true Lord and Master of creation and that man is simply called to be its steward or administrator. “Man could not safely be left to delight in his own power and authority rather than that of the one above Him (God) and to ignore His rights as Lord and Master”.<sup>131</sup> In other words, man has no absolute power over creation. “Human beings are not the sort of things that, once made and left to themselves by the one who made them, could do anything well all by themselves”.<sup>132</sup>

Augustine underscores the importance of work in man’s life. It is a participation in the act of God who never ceases to operate. As we have pointed out earlier, what the Bible says about God resting on the seventh day (cf. Gen 2:2-3) should not be interpreted in the sense of total cessation from work. God actually continues to work (cf. Jn 5:17)<sup>133</sup> and this can be seen in the way He keeps things in a state of existence with His providence. Augustine looks unfavorably at indolence on the part of people who are capable of working and not impeded physically or mentally from doing so. Think, for example, of his work *De opere monachorum* (written in 400/401) where he criticized the attitude and behavior of some monks in the vicinity of Carthage who refused to perform manual labor and preferred to roam around and beg instead, justifying themselves by making reference to Mt 6:25-34 (especially verse 26: “Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or stow away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them”). The bishop

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<sup>130</sup> *De Genesi ad litteram* 8.10.22.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.* 8.10.23.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.* 8.12.25.

<sup>133</sup> Augustine tried to reconcile this verse with Gen 2:2-3 in *De Genesi ad litteram* 6.10.17 and 6.11.19.

of Hippo, then, illustrates the need to work by citing examples from the Bible itself (from Saint Paul, in particular, who teaches in 2Thess 3:10 “If anyone will not work, let him not eat”).

### Idea of ongoing creation

Just as man was called to work in Paradise prior to his Fall, likewise he is expected to work in the present post-lapsarian world. Using his God-given capacities, man can continue to “cultivate and take care of the garden” (cf. Gen 2:15). In this way, he can continue to participate in God’s action and transform the world he lives in.

Man’s calling to work in the present world presupposes the idea that creation is still ongoing and that the world is yet perfectible, in a certain sense. Augustine calls our attention to the fact that there is change in the world and that new things seem to emerge from time to time. He says: “Those things which were due to be ‘unwrapped from their wrappings’ in the course of subsequent ages, and which God created simultaneously with all things when he made the world, were both completely finished then in a certain way and also started off in a certain way.... started off since they were *seeds* in a sense of future realities”.<sup>134</sup> He further explains: “We understand God to have finished these works when he created all things simultaneously so completely, that there is nothing for him still to create in the series of times which had not already been created by him here in the series of causes, while we take him to have started in that He here fixed the causes which he would put into effect later on”.<sup>135</sup> This idea that after the creation of all things was brought about in the first “six days” nothing else was brought into being, is stressed by Augustine.<sup>136</sup>

This whole distinction between what was already “complete” when God created all things and what is yet to be “unwrapped from their wrappings” readily calls to mind the Aristotelian distinction between

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<sup>134</sup> *De Genesi ad litteram* 6.10.17. Cf. W. A. Christian: 318 explains, “God ‘created all things at once’, though ... not all things were created in their present outward and visible forms” – cf. *ibid.* 329. This way of thinking applies also to the way Augustine looked at history at large, where certain events that never occurred before take place while some events end: cf. *ibid.* 324-325.

<sup>135</sup> *De Genesi ad litteram* 6.11.19.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.* 4.12.23. We shall not delve into the philosophical question concerning the relationship between time and creation, in this regard. For the complexity of the problem – cf. G. B. Matthews: 76-85. Also see Christian: 317ff.

“actuality” (ἐνέργεια) and “potency” (δύναμις). Indeed, the peripatetic philosopher speaks of things’ transition from potentiality to actuality<sup>137</sup> made possible by the presence of certain “principles” (ἀρχαί) of growth, movement and rest within things themselves.<sup>138</sup> It is not hard to discern Aristotle’s influence on Augustine, in this case, notwithstanding the fact that his knowledge of the philosopher’s teachings must have been limited and largely indirect (mostly through the works of Cicero and Varro).<sup>139</sup> The African bishop undoubtedly knew the teachings of Aristotle. He explicitly mentions his familiarity, for example, with Aristotle’s *Categories*.<sup>140</sup> In a way, it was denial of the teachings of Epicurus who, in his *Epistula ad Herodotum*, clearly says: “nothing comes into being out of what is not, for in that case everything would come into being out of everything, with no need for seeds. Also, if that which disappears were destroyed into what is not all, all things would have perished, for lack of that into which they dissolved. Moreover, the totality of things was always such as it is now and always will be, since there is nothing into which it changes”.<sup>141</sup> Clearly, for Augustine the world was created “not as a static reality, but as one full of dynamic evolution”.<sup>142</sup>

At any rate, Augustine states that all things were already “completely finished” when God created them and that “there is nothing for him still to create”, but at the same time he says that God, in a certain way, has also “started off since they were *seeds* in a sense of future realities”, qualifying that “He here fixed the causes which he would put into effect later on”.<sup>143</sup> These affirmations, especially the use of the

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<sup>137</sup> E. Ferguson: 320.

<sup>138</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Physica* 2.1.192b13-14 and *Metaphysica* 5.4.1015a13ff.

<sup>139</sup> M. W. Tkacz: 58.

<sup>140</sup> Cf. Augustine, *Confessiones* 4.16 and 4.28. Aside from the *Categories*, he also read the Aristotelian *De mundo*, but he attributes it to Apuleius: cf. *De civitate Dei* 4.2; Tkacz: 58. Augustine’s familiarity with the teachings of Aristotle also led him to question Julian of Eclanum’s grasp of Peripatetic dialectic: cf. *Contra Julianum* 3.2.7. He also used Aristotelian dialectic in his polemic against the Arians: cf. S. Heßbrüggen-Walter: 202-203, note 42.

<sup>141</sup> Epicurus, *Epistula ad Herodotum* 37.

<sup>142</sup> T. van Bavel: 15.

<sup>143</sup> Cf. W. A. Christian: 330: “From these seminal causes or ‘reasons’, they (*sc.* new things) were brought forth later, in the providence of God and in due time, in the visible forms in which they are now known to us”. cf. *De Genesi ad litteram* 5.23 where Augustine uses the image of a tree which develops in the course of time from its beginning in a seed. Hence, “just as from these origins are all things which arise, so each in its own time and of its own kind, they enter upon their coming forth and progressions ...”: *ibid.* 9.17.

term “seeds”, correspond to the doctrine of the “*rationes seminales*”.<sup>144</sup> Augustine’s mention of “seeds” is reminiscent of the Epicurean poet Lucretius’ teaching about “seeds” necessary for the production of more complex things<sup>145</sup> and of Stoicism.<sup>146</sup> However, the African bishop does not speak of such “seeds” in the atomic sense.

For Augustine, the “*rationes seminales*” refer to potentialities implanted in creation by God when He created all things. They are the underlying principles of production and reproduction in the universe and of change as it unfolds in time and space,<sup>147</sup> “dynamic principles of evolution working as natural laws”.<sup>148</sup> More specifically, the African bishop seems to be thinking in terms of “causality”.<sup>149</sup> Thus, things may emerge or altogether disappear depending on the causes governing change. Again, this reminds us of Aristotle’s discourse on different types of causes (αἰτίαι) – viz. material cause, efficient cause, formal cause, and final cause. God would have endowed creation with such causes, making it possible for things in this world to change, grow, and develop. However, whereas man sees change in creation as taking place in space and time, to God everything takes place in an eternal present. In other words, we may be seeing new things as emerging in the world, whereas for God they have already been present when He created all things.

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<sup>144</sup> Cf. G. P. Boersma: 413-441; Williams: 252. The “*rationes seminales*” are immutable, eternal reasons or causes of created things. They are also the underlying principles (*rationes*) of change, “the developmental forms of corporeal things”, as V. J. Bourke: 226 and 231 describes them. Bourke also sees traces of Platonic teachings (particularly of Plato’s theory of Ideas and Plotinus’ doctrine of the first emanation) in what Augustine says about them: *ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> A. A. Long: 39.

<sup>146</sup> E. TeSelle: 32.

<sup>147</sup> Some commentators want to see in this regard some support for the Darwinian theory of evolution, or even consider Augustine as “a patron of transformism”: cf. V. J. Bourke: 231, note 41. But “it is clear that St. Augustine did not envisage the possibility of new species coming into being after the initial six days of creation”: *ibid.* 231-232. Augustine also seems to be far from being “transformistic”: cf. *ibid.* 233. Transformism admits the possibility that one species may be gradually transformed into another by descent with modification through many generations. This was the evolutionary doctrine taught by the French naturalist Jean-Baptiste de Monet de Lamarck in the early 1800s.

<sup>148</sup> T. van Bavel: 15.

<sup>149</sup> R. Williams: 252 points out, in this regard, that “God’s will is not a cause among others, but the power that activates a particular set of causes at the appropriate time”. Cf. *De Genesi ad litteram* 6.14.25.

Thus, “all things which come into existence during the temporal history of the universe, grow from the original seed-like principles (*rationes seminales*) which God had sowed in His first act of founding the things of creation.... Various new individuals may come into being in the course of time, but God originally created all things together and at once (*omnia simul*)”.<sup>150</sup> “The act of creation involved the divine implantation of the capacities in the elements to produce varied species of things in nature”.<sup>151</sup>

The idea of change, growth and development can be directly linked to man’s role in creation and it applies to man himself, who also needs to grow, develop, etc.<sup>152</sup> Every time he applies his knowledge, understanding and skills and brings about change or transformation in what God had created, he is simply allowing the aforementioned causes to enter into action. He is not really bringing about anything new, in the strict sense of the term, or creating out of nothingness (*creatio ex nihilo*). Man will not be able to work unless there is something he can work on. In other words, technology is just an application of certain procedures and techniques to the existing materials.<sup>153</sup> And even in this case, Augustine reminds us (and let us quote it again) that “man could not safely be left to delight in his own power and authority rather than that of the one above Him (God) and to ignore His rights as Lord and master”.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Cf. *De Genesi ad litteram* 4.33.51, 4.33-34 and 4.33.52-55.

<sup>151</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 5.4.11.

<sup>152</sup> Human free will plays a crucial role in human development – cf. T. van Bavel: 14.

<sup>153</sup> We will not go into the complexity of defining what “technology” means. On this, cf. Eric Schatzberg, *Technology: Critical History of a Concept* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press 2018). For the present paper, we take it to indicate the application of man’s knowledge (speculative and practical) to the world around him, resulting in its transformation, to satisfy his needs and to make life easier.

<sup>154</sup> *De Genesi ad litteram* 8.10.23.

## Some principles with environmental and ecological implications

*Respect for creation knowing that we are not its master, but simply its stewards.*

Augustine reminds us that, based on his interpretation of the biblical account of creation, while God has given man “dominion” over the rest of creation, he is not its Lord and Master<sup>155</sup> and that he is simply called to “keep it” and take good care of it. This is what stewardship means. It entails being attentive to the intentions of creation’s true owner – God.<sup>156</sup>

The Hebrew word for “to have dominion” used in Gen 1:26 comes from the verb *rādāh* (רָדָה). A study of the verb reveals that it must be understood in terms of care-giving, even nurturing, not exploitation or malevolence.<sup>157</sup> On the other hand, the Hebrew word for “to work (it)” in Gen 2:15 comes from *’ābad* (עָבַד), meaning “to serve” or “to till”. Again, biblical exegetes interpret this to mean being attentive to or working the earth in a way that is to its benefit, “subduing” in the sense of developing the created order, nurturing the world to its fullest possible potential.<sup>158</sup> The ecological implications of this may not be easy to discern. However, a serious consideration of many of the existing problems today helps us understand that they come from a wrong way of looking at the world and from wrong attitudes concerning the way man considers his relationship with his environment. When man begins to look at the world and everything in it as subject to his absolute power and when he feels that he can do anything with the things around him as he pleases, problems arise. Irresponsible exploitation of nature takes place. Man becomes less and less concerned about the consequences of his activities, particularly of the way he handles natural resources. He considers himself as the absolute master of everything and fails to respect the natural processes around him.

As we have explained earlier, “dominion” according to Augustine means taking care of creation, keeping in mind that it belongs not to us but to God who created it to sustain all forms of life in the world.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Cf. J. Hyneman – C. Shore: 19.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.* 20.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.* 17.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> *De Genesi ad litteram* 8.10.22.



The world was created first. It was already existent even before man was formed, and man (symbolized by Adam and Eve) was put into the world (symbolized by the “garden”) to cultivate and take care of it. The biblical account clearly shows that the world’s primary purpose was to sustain human life.<sup>160</sup> God first created all things and when everything was arranged in the Garden of Eden, he created man, who was to derive his sustenance from it. He was given the freedom to eat of any fruit from any tree in the Garden of Eden, except from the “tree of knowledge of good and evil” (cf. Gen 2:9.17; 3:3.5). Such command given by God indicates the limit of what man can do with the world. This is part of Augustine’s understanding of “measure” (*mensura*) present in all existing creatures. Measure indicates, among other things, certain limits that must not be exceeded or “measured activity”, as L. Ayres describes it.<sup>161</sup> Measure sets a limit to everything.<sup>162</sup>

Man’s interaction with the rest of creation presupposes the proper use of certain faculties that God has given him. First among such faculties are human reason or intellect and free will.<sup>163</sup> Using their intellect, Adam and Eve understood God’s order and prohibition – order to take care and cultivate the rest of creation and prohibition as regards the fruit of the “tree of knowledge of good and evil”. God would not have given them such order and prohibition if they were not capable of understanding them. Unfortunately, as regards the exercise of free will, Adam and Eve fell short of discernment and allowed themselves to be tempted by the serpent, and their act of disobedience later led to their expulsion from the Garden of Eden.

Expulsion from Paradise led to man’s needing to toil and work hard to survive. Nature started being hostile to him. It started yielding thorns and thistles (cf. Gen 3:18). Human labor assumed a punitive

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<sup>160</sup> However, this does not have to result in that type of exploitative mentality pointed out by L. White, Jr.: 1205 when he says, “Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny – that is, by religion .... It is rooted in, and is indefensible apart from, Judeo-Christian teleology” and that “it is God’s will that man exploit nature for his proper ends”. He concludes that the growth of science and technology “cannot be understood historically apart from distinctive attitudes toward nature which are deeply grounded in Christian dogma”: *ibid.* 1207.

<sup>161</sup> L. Ayres: 551.

<sup>162</sup> *De Genesi ad litteram* 4.3.7. In the same text, Augustine defines measure as some sort of a “principle of action, to prevent an unalterable and unregulated process”.

<sup>163</sup> Cf. *Ibid.* 8.8.15 and *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* 1.17.28. Man uses the same faculties to exercise his “dominion” over creation: *ibid.* 1.20.31.

nuance. If prior to the Fall it was an expression of “pure exhilaration”, man’s disobedience turned it into a burdensome, oppressive and wearisome toil. Before, nature provided man with everything he needed. He simply had to pick fruits from any tree in the Garden of Eden. Now man has to work hard to survive, or as the Bible puts it: “through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life” (Gen 3:17); “by the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground” (Gen 3:19).

What Augustine says about man’s relationship with the rest of creation and human labor serves as a stern warning addressed to modern man, calling his attention to the possible consequences of his actions and reminding him of the eventual effects of his behavior on the world at large and on all forms of life in it. The destruction of the world through abusive use of one’s powers will, in the end, result in a negative or adverse reaction on the part of nature itself (just as the rest of creation started being hostile to Adam and Eve after their expulsion from the Garden of Eden or Paradise). Nowadays, environmentalists speak of the harmful effects of irresponsible intervention in nature on man’s part. We are aware, for example, of the effects of global warming due to the emission of harmful gas (like carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, nitric oxide and methane) in the atmosphere and of unregulated cutting down of trees leading to progressive deforestation and increasing desertification. Some equate all of these with “sins”, or as the official declaration of the World Vision International – a Christian humanitarian, aid, development, and advocacy organization founded in 1950 – puts it: “for human beings to destroy the biological diversity in God’s creation; for human beings to degrade the integrity of the earth by contributing to climate change, by stripping the earth of its natural forests or destroying its wetlands; for human beings to contaminate the earth’s waters, land and air – all of these are sins”.<sup>164</sup>

The destruction of nature has very serious negative effects on human life and the environment. Human existence is impossible without a healthy ecosystem, particularly concerning the land, the water and the air.<sup>165</sup> Last 2021, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration reported twenty weather and climate disaster events in the United States

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<sup>164</sup> J. Hyneman – C. Shore: 19.

<sup>165</sup> Cf. <https://leverageedu.com/blog/environmental-conservation/>

alone – severe storms, floods, drought, wild fires, etc.<sup>166</sup> All these resulted in extreme situations. On the one hand, drought leads to the lack of potable water in many parts of the world causing death and the spread of serious diseases. On the other hand, in places hit by severe storms and floods, properties and life are damaged and destroyed. Augustine was neither an environmentalist nor an ecologist. He was not even a positive natural scientist (in the strict sense of the term) with pragmatic solutions to environmental and ecological issues. However, his insights about the relationship between man and nature provide us with some orientation and guide as to how we should treat the environment and what our attitude should be towards the world at large.

*Human responsibility in the use of technology in transforming the world.*

Much of the modern-day problems concerning world environment is related to man's abusive use of technology in harnessing natural resources. We do not know when human exploitation of nature started. History professor Lynn White, Jr. traces it back to the mediaeval period.<sup>167</sup> At any rate, Augustine recognizes man's calling not only to guard and take care of the rest of creation (Gen 2:15), but also to "cultivate" it (where "to cultivate" is interpreted in the sense of transforming it and turning it into something different from how God originally created it). Changes in the natural world are possible because God has implanted "seeds" in everything he created.<sup>168</sup> Hence, from time to time we see changes in the world around us as some things seem to disappear while some things appear. In this case, man can contribute to bringing out the potentialities in creation by using the faculties God has given him.

Today man has gone a long way with the use of his intelligence and free will. Think, for example, of genetic engineering that enables us to modify the DNA composition of organisms and even to clone them. In terms of facilities and equipment, the results of modern technology can be seen practically everywhere, like in the field of Facilities

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<sup>166</sup> Cf. <https://www.nrdc.org/stories/are-effects-global-warming-really-bad>.

<sup>167</sup> Cf. his article "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis" in *Science*, vol. 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1203-1207, which was a product of a lecture he delivered on Dec. 26, 1966.

<sup>168</sup> *De Genesi ad litteram* 6.10.17 and 6.11.19.

Management (FM). Indeed, technology led to the invention of things never imagined before. They are now used not only in our world but also in outer space explorations and experiments. However, as in the case of any human action, technology, too, is a two-edged sword as it yields both positive and negative results affecting man and the world he lives in. While it has helped make life easier and more comfortable, its misuse has had undesirable impact on the environment. Cases of air and water pollution and depletion of natural resources easily come to mind.

Initiatives aimed at addressing environmental concerns are not lacking. Lately, the so-called “environmental technology” was developed, aimed at conserving, monitoring or reducing the negative impact of technology on the environment and the consumption of natural resources. Thus, it is sometimes also called “green” or “clean technology”.<sup>169</sup> An “International Day of Nature Conservation” is held every 28th of July worldwide, while “Earth Day” is celebrated every 22nd of April. The Kyoto Protocol was signed in 1997 by 160 different countries around the world. In 2005, it was ratified by 175 countries. At the same time, UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) was founded in 1992 in order to decrease the industrial greenhouse gases emissions (GHG). Last 2016, the Paris agreement entered into force. It was signed by 196 parties at the UN Climate Change Conference held in Paris in 2015 in an effort to combat climate change, etc.<sup>170</sup> If Augustine were still alive today, he would probably

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<sup>169</sup> Cf. <https://edinburghsensors.com/news-and-events/environmental-technology-the-impact-of-technology-on-the-environmentaltechnology/#:~:text=Resource%20depletion%20is%20another%20negative,either%20renewable%20or%20non%2Drenewable>. This is also the focus of M. Wiebe’s article when he speaks of a “green Augustine” in J. Doody – K. Paffenroth – M. Smillie: 181-196 which would be no other than an extension of man’s moral obligation toward the rest of creation. Wiebe states that man’s relationship with nature must be referred upward to man’s relationship with God, whence an ecologically inclusive form of love can come forth.

<sup>170</sup> Its overarching goal was to hold “the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels” and pursue efforts “to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels” (Art. 2.1.a of the Paris agreement). For the complete text of the Paris agreement, cf. [https://unfccc.int/files/meetings/paris\\_nov\\_2015/application/pdf/paris\\_agreement\\_english.pdf?gclid=C-jwKCAjwscGjBhAXEiwAswQqNMTwmvl07Pf4i\\_SzRBEuqsCRuZ\\_maCjD7f-pYLrSK7jFmXVzDVHC4bhoCZjEQAvD\\_BwE](https://unfccc.int/files/meetings/paris_nov_2015/application/pdf/paris_agreement_english.pdf?gclid=C-jwKCAjwscGjBhAXEiwAswQqNMTwmvl07Pf4i_SzRBEuqsCRuZ_maCjD7f-pYLrSK7jFmXVzDVHC4bhoCZjEQAvD_BwE).

support such initiatives and, again, call our attention to a responsible use of our capacities in transforming the world or bringing out of it those “seeds” inherent to creation itself.

While Augustine’s interest in the transformation of the world was more philosophical and theological in nature, his insights certainly have significant implications for modern environmental and ecological discussions. That the world we live in is subject to transformation on man’s part is a given fact. However, there must be clear guidelines to follow, setting limitations to technology and to its use and application to human life and the environment. In line with what we have pointed out previously, any unregulated exercise of human capacities can easily lead to abuse. In the end, man himself will suffer all the negative results of his actions. Let us repeat the words of Augustine at this point: “Man could not safely be left to delight in his own power and authority rather than that of the one above Him (God) and to ignore His rights as Lord and master”.<sup>171</sup>

The African bishop would not be against modern technology and its use. In fact, he considered it as implied when God created man and endowed him with reason and free will. For Augustine, man is called to play an active role in the “ongoing creation” of God. He was called to work right from the very beginning, to cultivate the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:15). And such order to work continues even after man was driven out of Paradise. He is still expected to toil and to eat by the sweat of his brow (Gen 3:17.19; cf. 3:23). But just like in the Garden of Eden, there are limitations to what man can do and to the way he should use his powers. For one, human life must always be upheld as the highest value. The use of technology should in no way be detrimental to it in the end. The integrity of the environment must also be respected. Any destruction of it will eventually endanger human life.<sup>172</sup> If in the beginning, misuse of his reason and free will led to man’s expulsion from Paradise, we may expect a similar punishment if we continue to misuse the same capacities through technology. Augustine’s teaching is quite clear on this: man must avoid doing anything that would eventually “earn him expulsion from it (*sc.* Paradise)” and “avoid being thrown out of it” again.<sup>173</sup> In this case, that tragic history must not repeat itself.

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<sup>171</sup> *De Genesi ad litteram* 8.10.23.

<sup>172</sup> Cf. *Contra Fortunatum* 15; T. van Bavel: 17.

<sup>173</sup> *De Genesi ad litteram* 8.10.22.

*Recognition of and respect for the world's internal processes.*

Still in line with the idea of “ongoing creation”, Augustine says that after God had created the world, He has not abandoned it and left it on its own. On the contrary, his providence keeps it in a state of existence. Even the changes that take place in it simply follow certain laws that God himself has set in creation. “There is nothing for him still to create in the series of times which had not already been created by him here in the series of causes, while we take him to have started in that he here fixed the causes which he would put into effect later on”.<sup>174</sup> Earlier we said that we take “causes” here as corresponding (among other things) with the laws of nature that govern the world and all things in it. Such laws regulate realities’ passage from potency to actuality.

The idea of certain laws at work and governing things in nature is a welcome one for modern environmentalists and ecologists. For example, the existence of a “food chain” presupposes such laws. The so-called “energy pyramid” also presupposes such laws governing the relationship among autotrophs, herbivores, carnivores, omnivores and detritivores involved on a trophic level. Likewise, the claim that non-renewable natural resources are limited and that continuous irresponsible use of them would lead to their depletion relies on the same presupposition. Last example would be the proposal that nature must be given sufficient time to renew itself before harnessing her resources again. It also presupposes the existence of natural laws. The list of examples can still go on. Our point is this: cycles in nature (including that of life itself) must be recognized and respected. Otherwise, disasters arise, and this is precisely what environmentalists and ecologists are warning us about.<sup>175</sup>

Scientists say that it is not yet too late to reverse the process of world destruction. Human actions that may cause it can still be regulated, for example, through reduction of industrial activities that emit gases

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<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.* 6.11.19.

<sup>175</sup> For example, read: <https://www.un.org/en/un75/climate-crisis-race-we-can-win>. On the main environmental issues, see [https://www.appropedia.org/List\\_of\\_environmental\\_issues?gclid=CjwKCAjwvdajBhBEEiwAeMh1U0dorirXFZmShM-rf85JK5qTqz\\_cZeTRaiSHT2Ei8FC63Cuq8skcD\\_xoCxfMQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.appropedia.org/List_of_environmental_issues?gclid=CjwKCAjwvdajBhBEEiwAeMh1U0dorirXFZmShM-rf85JK5qTqz_cZeTRaiSHT2Ei8FC63Cuq8skcD_xoCxfMQAvD_BwE). On the threat of climate change in particular, see <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/10/climate-change-greatest-threat-world-has-ever-faced-un-expert-warns>.

into the atmosphere, or through recycling. Vehicle and household emissions can also be lessened with the use of “green technology”. Tree cutting can likewise be controlled. Use of plastic can be prohibited, and so forth. Sometimes all we need is political will that would draft, approve and implement environment-friendly measures. The underlying principle in all this is that the world must be saved and that its natural processes must be respected. Augustine may not provide us with detailed solutions and plans to follow, in this regard. He may not offer us technical scientific information (at least, not in the modern sense), but his insights about the existence of laws governing the world and natural processes remain valid on the level of principle.

The use of technology (of which we were talking about earlier) presupposes the recognition of laws in nature. Man has succeeded in deciphering such laws and have used his knowledge of them to his own advantage. However, following the insights of Augustine, man’s familiarity with such laws does not give him the right to use them in any way he pleases. Certain limitations need to be observed. To this we may link the earlier principles we have already discussed – viz. first, that man should be reminded that he is not the owner, lord and master of the world, but only its steward and, second, while God has given him powers or capacities which he can apply to transform the world, the use of technology should also have limitations.

The way we look at man and his relationship with nature does affect the way we use technology and apply it to the world. As Lynn White, Jr. states: “What we do about ecology depends on our ideas of the man-nature relationship”.<sup>176</sup> Augustine certainly would not have contributed to the alleged Christian mentality that shaped people’s way of thinking during the mediaeval period that convinced them that everything in the world only served his purposes, that man had absolute dominion over nature,<sup>177</sup> and that the world had no intrinsic value.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Flynn White, Jr.: 1206. Cf. 1205: “What people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them. Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny.”

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.* 1205.

<sup>178</sup> Edward Horski’s paper “Augustine on Environment” (1998) serves (among other things) to refute this distorted belief.

## Summary and Conclusion

Thinkers since time immemorial have speculated about creation, man's place in it, and more specifically about the relationship between man and the world. Early Greek philosophers were among the first ones to do so. They advanced opposing views about the origin of the world, whether it is eternal or not, intrinsically good or evil, whether everything that exists is made of matter or not, and so forth. Jewish and Christian traditions provided cosmological speculations with a particular orientation, upholding the idea that God is the creator of all things, that he created everything out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*), that he continues to interact with his creation through his providence, that he set certain laws within the world itself underlying changes in it, and so forth. Among the first Christian thinkers who elaborated on such ideas was Augustine of Hippo. His biblical commentaries, particularly his interpretation of the creation account in the book of Genesis, provide us with interesting insights which we believe can have implications for modern-day discussions about environmental conservation and ecology.

Without extracting Augustine's ideas from their proper historico-cultural contexts, with particular reference to teachings derived from ancient Greek philosophies and from Gnosticism and Manicheism that advanced doctrines contrary to the teachings of the early Christian Church, we have highlighted at least three key principles that may guide today's discussion about the environment and man's role in it – viz. first, that man is not the owner, lord and master of the world, but only its steward; second, that man was able to develop technology using some of the natural abilities that God has given him, but that the use of such technology, particularly in transforming the world, must observe certain limitations; and, third, that while man's decipherment of laws governing nature has led him to more and more advanced technology, natural processes must be recognized and respected. Failure to abide by these simple guiding principles may lead to natural disasters, imbalances in nature, abusive exploitation of world resources, and destruction of the world itself.

Augustine lived centuries ago, long before the negative effects of human abuses and irresponsibility began to manifest themselves on a global scale. His insights about the world and man's relationship with it were born out of totally different contexts. However, it is surprising



how they continue to remain valid and to lend themselves to modern application in the field of environmental conservation and ecology. Utilitarianism and its principles alone should not guide human behavior and way of thinking and the way he interacts with the world. While technology, indeed, has made human life easier and more comfortable, unbridled use of it will eventually turn to man's disadvantage (as can already be seen in many situations in the world today). Many modern environmentalists and ecologists may not be Christian believers, but this should not lead them to close their eyes and turn deaf ears to sound principles coming from a Christian thinker like Augustine. It is a common battle that the entire humanity must wage against any forms of abuse and irresponsible exploitation of world resources, independently of one's religious convictions and faith affiliations.

### **Recommendation**

The present article limited itself to Augustine's insights as contained mostly in his commentaries on the book of Genesis, which were among his earliest exegetical writings. The African bishop expresses similar insights in his interpretation of the same themes contained in his other works based on his reading of the creation account. It would be good to consider such insights and adopt a more chronological approach to trace the development of his ideas.

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# **The Concept of Anthropocene in the *Laudato Si'* Encyclical of Pope Francis: Implications for the Reception of Ecological Theology in Christian Communities**

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## ***Abstract***

*The article presents the discussion on the Anthropocene concept in the Laudato Si' encyclical of Pope Francis; and its impact on faith communities.*

*This article provides the definition of Anthropocene as a subject matter in ecology and as an emerging scientific viewpoint on the climate crisis. Likewise, the author uniquely presents the correlation of the ecological vision of Pope Francis with the scientific formulation of the Anthropocene impacts on the planet.*

*From here eco-theology becomes an instrument of contemporary science and ecological action - where theological and ethical responses contribute to a broader Anthropocene understanding.*

*This article concludes the importance of the response of faith communities (ecumenical response) in acknowledging the loss of the ecosystem resulting from human impacts.*

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Keywords: Integral Ecology, Creation, Ecological Justice, Climate impacts, Ecumenism and Ecology, human-induced impacts

## INTRODUCTION

The task of ecological responsibility is being embraced by Christian communities across denominations with bolder commitment. This response is unprecedented in commitment, compared to the last two decades. The contemporary leaders of Christian churches, like Patriarch Bartholomew of the Greek Orthodox Church, emphasizes the element of sin in human actions in the degradation of the earth<sup>1</sup>; Pope Francis of the Roman Catholic Church, insists on the protection of the common home threatened by ecological collapse and social exclusion<sup>2</sup>; and Archbishop Justin Welby of the Anglican Communion, stresses that people of faith have a unique call to address the causes of climate change.<sup>3</sup> The ecological concerns cited by these religious leaders are all related to the climate crisis affecting not only their respective churches but all of humanity, emphasizing the moral dimension of the Christian response to the ecological destruction.

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<sup>1</sup>Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, ‘Remarks As Prepared for Delivery Address of His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew at the Environmental Symposium’, [online document], (8 November 1997) <<https://ec-patr.org/remarks-as-prepared-for-delivery-address-of-his-all-holiness-ecumenical-patriarch-b-a-r-t-h-o-l-o-m-e-w-at-the-environmental-symposium-saint-barbara-greek-orthodox-church-santa-barbara-california-8/>>, accessed 13 April 2022.

<sup>2</sup>Pope Francis, ‘Address to the Participants in the Plenary Session of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences’, [online document], (28 November 2016) <[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/november/documents/papa-francesco\\_20161128\\_pontificia-accademia-scienze.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/november/documents/papa-francesco_20161128_pontificia-accademia-scienze.html)>, accessed 25 March 2022.

<sup>3</sup>Archbishop Justin Welby, ‘Our Moral Opportunity on Climate Change’, *Statement* [online document], (3 November 2017) <<https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/our-moral-opportunity-climate-change>>, accessed 17 April 2022.

In 2015, Pope Francis released the encyclical entitled, *Laudato Si': On the Care of Our Common Home*<sup>4</sup>, as his pastoral response to the environmental crisis. The urgent appeal of Pope Francis emphasizes a global response: “we need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all.”<sup>5</sup> This statement indicates a global challenge, not only for Roman Catholics, but for all people.

The primary reference of this paper is the encyclical letter of Pope Francis *Laudato Si'*. This papal document has brought a high level of ecological awareness in Christendom, for it is an ethical reference for other church communities and religious institutions to address the ecological issues affecting the earth and its people.

This thesis focuses on the *Anthropocene* concept existing in the encyclical. The encyclical articulates and upholds the human-induced causes of the climate crisis. With this, Pope Francis connects his encyclical to science; he presents a realistic understanding of the Anthropocene concept:

Humanity is called to recognize the need for changes of lifestyle, production and consumption, in order to combat this warming or at least the human causes which produce or aggravate it. [...] a number of scientific studies indicate that most global warming in recent decades is due to the great concentration of greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide, methane, nitrogen oxides and others) released mainly as a result of human activity.<sup>6</sup>

The third chapter of the encyclical is entitled “The Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis”<sup>7</sup>; this chapter encourages the re-examination of our Christian understanding that sees human beings as possessing a particular dignity above other creatures<sup>8</sup>, which builds an egoism in man to have all the privileges over non-human species and the capacity to destroy all of creation. Lynn White’s view of Christianity as “[...] the

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<sup>4</sup>Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On the Care for our Common Home* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015). To be cited in the following notes as *LS*.

<sup>5</sup>*LS*, §14.

<sup>6</sup>*LS*, §23.

<sup>7</sup>*LS*, §115-136.

<sup>8</sup>*LS*, §119.



most anthropocentric religion the world has seen”<sup>9</sup> challenges the Christian institutions to examine their contribution to the destruction of nature, and stimulated some Christian theologians to make a thorough transformation of Christian theology.<sup>10</sup>

Briefly, the concept of Anthropocene as a new geological era was introduced and proposed by Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer in the year 2000.<sup>11</sup> The idea of the “Anthropocene” as being “of an age marked by far-reaching human influence on the Earth”, is new.<sup>12</sup> It is considered to be a departure from the geological epoch of the Holocene, and human activity is responsible for this egress, making humankind a global geological force.<sup>13</sup> Paul Crutzen declares in the paper he delivered during the Vatican-sponsored conference in 2016, ‘the growing disturbance of earth’s natural systems by human activities created a new geological era, which I have dubbed the “Anthropocene”’.<sup>14</sup>

This research will contribute to the breadth of the Anthropocene-related research, where the understanding of faith communities on the ecological crisis is also anchored on the recognition of the human activity as a contributing factor to the crisis.

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<sup>9</sup>Lynn White, Jr., ‘The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis’, *Science*, 155/3767 (1967), 1203-7 at 1205.

<sup>10</sup>Ernst M. Conradie, *Christianity and Ecological Theology: Resources for Further Research* (Study Guides in Religion and Theology 11, Stellenbosch: African Sun Media, 2006) at 67.

<sup>11</sup>Helmuth Trischler, ‘The Anthropocene’, *NTM Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Wissenschaften, Technik und Medizin*, 24/3 (2016), 309-335 at 310.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Will Steffen et al., ‘The Anthropocene: Conceptual and Historical Perspectives’, *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A: Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences*, 369/1938 (2011), 842-867 at 843.

<sup>14</sup>Paul J. Crutzen, ‘The Anthropocene: The Current Human-Dominated Geological Era, Paths of Discovery’, *Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Acta 18* [online document], (2006) <<https://www.pas.va/content/dam/casinapioiv/pas/pdf-volumi/acta/acta-18-pdf-papers/acta18-crutzen.pdf>>, 199-293 at 201, accessed 21 February 2022.

## UNDERSTANDING THE ANTHROPOCENE CONCEPT

The environmental crisis has been considered as anthropogenic and human-induced, as emphasized by many climate scientists and scientific bodies—the accelerated human activities have destroyed the planet. This Anthropocene element is apparently visible in the form of ecological destruction with catastrophic impacts on people and nature, including damaging climate impacts, massive deforestation, desertification in once fertile areas, depletion of natural resources, sea-level rise, species extinction, and uncontrolled waste and pollution. As these events are occurring periodically, the scientific community is becoming more engaged in finding solutions to the crisis by providing accurate research findings related to the interrelationship of human-impacts and climate change; this is proven by the current availability of published materials on the Anthropocene topic. On the other hand, the faith communities try to articulate the ethical role of churches in the ecological crisis, providing an ecological framework for believers to recognize the importance of science-based approach to address the crisis.

In this chapter, the Anthropocene understanding is presented as it is defined in science and environmental institutions, as it is understood by the major ecumenical organizations or church bodies, and as it influenced the ecological vision of Pope Francis.

### The Anthropocene History as Connected to Science

The word Anthropocene is derived from the Greek words *anthropo*, meaning ‘man’, and *cene*, meaning ‘new.’ Anthropocene refers to the geological epoch that started when human activities began to create destructive impact on the planet and ecosystems. The term was adopted as a replacement for the official Holocene epoch. Biologist, Eugene Storer, and chemist, Paul Crutzen,<sup>15</sup> were the proponents of the contemporary Anthropocene concept, this was proposed around the

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<sup>15</sup>Frank Biermann and Eva Lövbrand, ‘Encountering the “Anthropocene”’: Setting the Scene’, in Frank Biermann and Eva Lövbrand (eds.), *Anthropocene Encounters: New Directions in Green Political Thinking* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 1-22 at 1.

year 2000.<sup>16</sup> In a one-page article entitled “Geology of Mankind,” Paul Crutzen then defined Anthropocene as a descriptive phenomenon:

For the past three centuries, the effects of humans on the global environment have escalated. Because of these anthropogenic emissions of carbon dioxide, global climate may depart significantly from natural behaviour for many millennia to come. It seems appropriate to assign the term ‘Anthropocene’ to the present, in many ways human-dominated, geological epoch, supplementing the Holocene — the warm period of the past 10–12 millennia.<sup>17</sup>

The groundbreaking work of Crutzen brought global acceptability of the Anthropocene theme.

The early definition of the Anthropocene concept revolved around the world of science. It started from the scientific work of Antonio Stoppani (in 1873), who described the *Anthropozoic era* as a ‘new telluric force which in power and universality may be compared to the greater forces of earth’; and of Vladimir Ivanovich Vernadsky (in 1926), who underlined the self-destruction of the planet by man.<sup>18</sup>

It is also important to cite the historical antecedents of the origin of the concept outlined in the journal article entitled: ‘The Anthropocene: Conceptual and Historical Perspectives.’<sup>19</sup> Here, the authors provide key historical timelines characterized by: a) scientific and academic activities and conferences (*Man’s Role in Changing the Face of the Earth* in 1955; *The Earth as Transformed by Human Action* in 1956); and b) publication of books, conference papers, and academic reports and manuals (*Our Plundered Planet* by Fairfield Osborn; *Limits to Growth* by the Club of Rome; *Global Warming* by Andrew C. Revkin, 1992; *Sustainable Development of the Biosphere* edited by William Clark; the works of George Perkins among them *The Earth as Modified by Human Action*).<sup>20</sup> In the many debates and scientific discussions related to the beginning

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<sup>16</sup>Trischler, ‘The Anthropocene’, 310.

<sup>17</sup>Paul Crutzen, ‘Geology of mankind’, *Nature* [online article], 415 (03 January 2002) <<https://www.nature.com/articles/415023a.pdf>>, 23, accessed 11 February 2022.

<sup>18</sup>Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer, ‘Anthropocene’, *IGBP Newsletter*, 41 (2000), 17–18 at 17.

<sup>19</sup>Steffen et al., “The Anthropocene”, 842–856.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

of the Anthropocene's impacts on the planet, many have thought that it either started during the Industrial revolution (in the 1800's) or during 1945, when the atomic bomb was tested and used during the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings—disseminating radioactive particles in the soil globally.<sup>21</sup>

This new geological epoch as proposed is an important time treatment of the ecological damage. The Anthropocene term may not be officially accepted and even highly debated by scientific institutions and organizations, it however, gained prominence among environmental scientists and educators. The concept has transformed into a transdisciplinary concept outside of its classic importance in the natural and human sciences.

### **The Anthropocene Imprint in the Eco-Theological Vision of Pope Francis**

Certainly, the Anthropocene discussion poses a challenge to Christian theology on how to be able to find a coherent understanding of stewardship that leads to change in humanity<sup>22</sup>. Celia Deane-Drummond, eco-theology scholar, writes '[...]God does indeed exist and is active in the created world rather than the opposite[...]'<sup>23</sup>. It is precisely in this aspect that Pope Francis insists on human cooperation for the care of creation. Thus, it is necessary to identify the theological markers of Pope Francis' eco-theological vision.

### **The Theological Understanding of the Natural World**

Pope Francis offers the invitation 'to see nature as a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of his infinite beauty and goodness.'<sup>24</sup> The recognition of nature as the revelation of God is rooted in Christian tradition. The description given by Pope Francis to describe nature as a magnificent book is a metaphor from

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<sup>21</sup>National Geographic Society, 'Anthropocene', *Resource Library* [online], (updated 22 May 2022) <<https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/anthropocene>>, accessed 25 May 2022.

<sup>22</sup>LS, §9.

<sup>23</sup>Celia Deane-Drummond, 'Performing the Beginning in the End: A Theological Anthropology for the Anthropocene', in Celia Deane-Drummond et al. (eds.), *Religion in the Anthropocene* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017), 173-187 at 184.

<sup>24</sup>LS, §12.

the *Book of Works*, where St. John Chrysostom meant ‘the book of creatures’ or nature itself.<sup>25</sup> The whole story of creation is a narrative of God’s creative power, where the scene in Genesis unfolds the creation of life—of all the living beings.

Likewise, the ecological crisis presents the human incapacities to see nature as a revelation of God’s beauty and goodness. It is in this aspect where Pope Francis offers us a return to the theological understanding of nature, which is an essential aspect of Christian ecological practice.<sup>26</sup>

### **The Destiny of All Creation in Christ**

Christ’s presence is a revelation of God, one and triune. *Laudato Si’* clearly underlines this Christological element:

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)... 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.<sup>27</sup>

This implies that through the incarnation God entered into nature and redirected the natural world into his original plan, thereby, connecting creation to redemption. Accordingly, Christ mediates in creation as the word of God, and saves the world as the incarnate Son of God.

### **Ecological Conversion**

The ecological crisis calls for ecological conversion—a return to the Creator. This offers a distinctive challenge to humanity’s damaging of the planet. Pope Francis echoes the challenge of the Australian Bishops’ Conference on achieving reconciliation with creation: “To achieve such reconciliation, we must examine our lives and acknowledge the ways

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<sup>25</sup>Peter M. J. Hess, ‘Nature and the Word of God in Inter-religious Dialogue’ [online article], <<https://metanexus.net/archive/conference2004/pdf/hess.pdf>>, accessed 29 April 2022.

<sup>26</sup>Denis Edwards, ‘Everything Is Interconnected: The Trinity and the Natural World in *Laudato Si’*’, *The Australasian Catholic Record*, 94 (2017), 81-92 at 83.

<sup>27</sup>*LS*, §99.

in which we have harmed God's creation through our actions and our failure to act. We need to experience a conversion, or change of heart."<sup>28</sup>

The immensity of the ecological crisis is acknowledged also as a crisis of values. The Greek Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas argues that "the Church will have to revise radically her concept of sin, which traditionally has been limited to the social and anthropological level and start speaking of sin against nature as a matter of primary religious significance."<sup>29</sup> Accordingly, Pope Francis quotes Patriarch Bartholomew on the sins against creation:

For human beings... to destroy the biological diversity of God's creation; for human beings to degrade the integrity of the earth by causing changes in its climate, by stripping the earth of its natural forests or destroying its wetlands; for human beings to contaminate the earth's waters, its land, its air, and its life – these are sins.<sup>30</sup>

### **Trinitarian Communion**

The foundation of the interconnectedness of all beings is the triune God, who is the Creator of all things. Pope Francis describes this in the encyclical, "Everything is interconnected, and this invites us to develop a spirituality of that global solidarity which flows from the mystery of the Trinity."<sup>31</sup> This aspect of trinitarian communion in the theological vision of Pope Francis is anchored on the doctrine that God is the creator of all things, as John Carmody reiterates, "nature, as well as humanity, reflects its trinitarian source."<sup>32</sup>

Denis Edwards offers a deep reflection,

This theology of God's creative presence to each creature through the Word and in the Spirit, enabling each creature to

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<sup>28</sup>LS, §218. Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference, 'A New Earth – The Environmental Challenge' [online document], <<https://socialjustice.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Social-Justice-Statement-2002.pdf>>, accessed 10 April 2022.

<sup>29</sup>John Zizioulas (Metropolitan of Pergamon), 'Foreword', in John Chryssavgis (ed.), *Cosmic Grace Humble Prayer: The Ecological Vision of the Green Patriarch Bartholomew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), viiix at viii.

<sup>30</sup>LS, §8.

<sup>31</sup>LS, §240.

<sup>32</sup>John Carmody, *Ecology and Religion: Toward a New Christian Theology of Nature* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983) at 121.

participate in its own way in the Trinity, already offers a foundation for developing a contemporary ecological theology.<sup>33</sup>

This trinitarian element in creation is an important theological basis for Christians, as a counter-thesis to Lynn White's generalization. The Anthropocene scholar Bruno Latour, insists not to entirely put the blame on Christian theology, but rather on Christianity's gradual abandonment of the concerns of the cosmos and on the focus on the salvation of humans alone.<sup>34</sup>

### INTERCONNECTIVITY OF THE ANTHROPOCENE CONCEPT AND *LAUDATO SI'*

The declaration of Paul Crutzen of the new geological epoch as the "Anthropocene" has encouraged academic interest in the topic, not only in the relevant natural sciences and in other disciplines<sup>35</sup>, but it has also contributed to the deepening of the theological understanding and pastoral commitment of faith communities to ecology. Pope Francis includes this Anthropocene understanding in the *Laudato Si'* encyclical through the context of synchronizing findings of climate science with causes of climate change. He states: "the continued acceleration of changes affecting humanity and the planet is coupled today with a more intensified pace of life and work which might be called 'rapidification'."<sup>36</sup> Further, *Laudato Si'* offers a resolute critique on the anthropocentric attitudes characterizing the contemporary analysis of the ecological crisis. Distinctively, it provides an ethical platform for combating the problem of anthropocentrism as the driver of rapid ecological destruction.

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<sup>33</sup>Denis Edwards, 'Where on Earth is God? Exploring an Ecotheological Theology of the Trinity in the Tradition of Ahtanasius', in Ernst M. Conradie et al. (eds.), *Christian Faith and the Earth: Current Paths and Emerging Horizons in Ecotheology* (United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 11-29 at 15.

<sup>34</sup>Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime* (Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity, 2017) at 210.

<sup>35</sup>Ian Barns, 'Contesting the Good Life of Technological Modernity in the Anthropocene', in Celia Deane-Drummond et al. (eds.), *Religion in the Anthropocene* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017), 269-282 at 269.

<sup>36</sup>LS, § 18.

## **Pope Francis' response to the Anthropogenic Character of the Ecological Crisis**

In the encyclical, Pope Francis provides the core drivers of the Anthropocene motif, probing into the multi-layer causes of the ecological crisis. As he says in the beginning of Chapter 3, "It would hardly be helpful to describe the symptoms without acknowledging the human origins of the ecological crisis."<sup>37</sup> Accordingly, he presents two major characters of the ecological crisis as expanded in the encyclical, namely, the human roots of the ecological crisis and the technocratic paradigm.

### **Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis**

Pope Francis offers a deliberate articulation of the Anthropocene language in the whole of the encyclical by announcing human culpability for the continuing destruction of the planet. He describes this in the introduction of the encyclical as "a tragic consequence of unchecked human activity,"<sup>38</sup> a phrase often repeated in the different sections of the document. In the same manner, this also appears in other pronouncements and documents. For example, in the document *Querida Amazonia* he states: "the great majority become extinct for reasons related to human activity."<sup>39</sup>

The constant use of "human activity" as a parallel description to the "human-induced" term in the climate science jargon solidifies the Anthropocene concept in *Laudato Si'*. On the other hand, Pope Francis offers a counter-balance to the negative character of the term by introducing the concept of "human ecology"<sup>40</sup> as a descriptive framework of human responsibility to understand the ecological crisis.

The extent of human activity can be seen in all aspects of human existence, from the effects of human consumption at both micro and macro levels, to population density. Pope Francis tries to point out the

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<sup>37</sup>LS, §101.

<sup>38</sup>LS, §4.

<sup>39</sup>Pope Francis, 'Querida Amazonia', *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation* [online document], (02 February 2020) <[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20200202\\_querida-amazonia.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20200202_querida-amazonia.html)>, §54, accessed 03 May 2022.

<sup>40</sup>LS, §155.



scandalous and excessive level of consumption, not just from the ecological perspective, but also as a social justice issue and a moral crisis.<sup>41</sup> In contrast to the scientific position regarding the impact of population growth to the environment, the encyclical is transparent in its position that population growth cannot be blamed entirely as a contributor to the environmental problem. Pope Francis insists on addressing the imbalance product consumption and waste caused by the wealthy minority rather than addressing the reduction of birth rate. Perceptively, the social scientist, Petra Steinmair-Posel, states, “Pope Francis calls our attention to yet another aspect that should be considered as we face the challenges of the Anthropocene: the escalation to extremes through untamed consumption can never fulfill the endless desires of our hearts.”<sup>42</sup>

The burden of responsibility rests on humans, accountable for bringing accelerated changes in the earth systems which has led to the loss of many species; further, threats of large-scale extinctions and great suffering of human communities still loom.<sup>43</sup> Human-centeredness provides the backbone in anything that justifies the need to harness earth’s resources, and even the license to abuse the environment. Pope Francis sees this kind of attitude as a “form of relativism”.<sup>44</sup> Thus, he provides a clear message on the anthropocentric attitude: “we need constantly to rethink the goals, effects, overall context and ethical limits of this human activity, which is a form of power involving considerable risks.”<sup>45</sup>

In *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis takes pains to acknowledge that the various manifestations of the contemporary ecological crisis are indeed caused by humans. There is nearly unanimous consensus in the scientific community about the anthropogenic effect on climate change,

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<sup>41</sup>Joshtrom Kureethadam, *The Ten Green Commandments of Laudato Si’* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2019) at 79.

<sup>42</sup>Petra Steinmair-Pösel, ‘Cooled Down Love and an Overheated Atmosphere: René Girard On Ecology and Apocalypticism in the Anthropocene’, in Celia Deane-Drummond et al. (eds.), *Religion in the Anthropocene* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017), 188-201 at 200.

<sup>43</sup>Edwards, ‘Where on Earth’, 11.

<sup>44</sup>LS, §122.

<sup>45</sup>LS, §131.

Pope Francis affirms, “A very solid scientific consensus indicates that we are presently witnessing a disturbing warming of the climatic system.”<sup>46</sup>

### **Dominant Technocratic Paradigm as Enabler of the Roots of the Crisis**

The technocratic paradigm is identified in the encyclical as one of the root causes of the climate crisis. The paradigm is an archetype found in business, economics, and technological advancement, cultivating a limitless attitude in the hope of unlimited progress. This paradigm, however, is a purely utilitarian attitude that will entirely exhaust the planet and hasten ecological destruction.

Pope Francis’ repudiation on the utilitarian character of technocratic paradigm is “based on the lie that there is an infinite supply of the earth’s goods, [which] leads to the planet being squeezed dry beyond every limit”.<sup>47</sup> He adds “[the] effects of imposing this model on reality as a whole, human and social, are seen in the deterioration of the environment[...].”<sup>48</sup> There is an undeniable contribution of technocratic systems on the massive destruction of the Earth systems through the domination and exploitation of the natural world. The Minjung theology pioneer, Kim Yong-Bock, criticizes the distorted “messianic vision of technopia,” saying that “the idea of immortality through technology, even if it were possible, is based on a distorted view of life.”<sup>49</sup> Further, men and women “intervened in nature[...];” that is, “we are the ones to lay our hands on things, attempting to extract everything possible from them.”<sup>50</sup> Here thus shows the mark of technocratic dominance on society’s natural resources.

A critic of Pope Francis, concerning the technocratic paradigm; Edmund Waldstein claims: “unlimited technological progress is the engine of economic growth, and unlimited economic growth the measure

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<sup>46</sup>LS, § 23.

<sup>47</sup>LS, §106.

<sup>48</sup>LS, §107.

<sup>49</sup>Kim Yong-Bock, ‘A Christian theological discourse on integral life in the context of Asian civilization’, in Ernst M. Conradie et al. (eds.), *Christian Faith and the Earth: Current Paths and Emerging Horizons in Ecotheology* (United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 219-231 at 226.

<sup>50</sup>LS, §106.

of technological progress”.<sup>51</sup> Pope Francis counters by asserting that the constant interchangeability of technological progress with economic progress leads to both environmental degradation and human, as well as social, degradation.<sup>52</sup> Daniel Castillo situates the technocratic paradigm within the context of colonial history. He says that it “functioned as the organizing rationale for the plunder of the earth at the periphery of the colonial project”.<sup>53</sup> While Philip Goodchild, a professor of religion and philosophy at the University of Nottingham, agrees that technocratic paradigm and excessive consumption are vital components of an ecological disease, he asserts the rootedness of this disease to the disrespect of natural order and prideful self-assertion.<sup>54</sup>

The current social and environmental movements are demanding for climate justice. Among them, Greenpeace and Extinction Rebellion are targeting the big climate polluters, financial institutions, and governments for being the global culprits of the environmental destruction. Greenpeace, in its latest petition campaign “ALL for the Amazon”, pushed for stronger environmental governance policies in Brazil to address massive land-grabbing affecting the lives of the indigenous people and accelerating deforestation in the Amazon region.<sup>55</sup> The ecological roots of the crisis are fast-tracked by the corporate model of development; as Pope Francis mentioned, the “increase of progress” motivates the immensity of technological and economic power.<sup>56</sup>

Other than the human-centered worldview of the ecological crisis, much has to be done in the context of the capitalist-centered worldview where technology and economy are given importance. *Laudato Si'* explicitly outlines this, stating,

Economic powers continue to justify the current global system where priority tends to be given to speculation and the pursuit of

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<sup>51</sup>Edmund Waldstein, ‘A Magnificent, a Wonderful Encyclical’ [online article], (19 June 2015) <<https://sancrucensis.wordpress.com/2015/06/19/a-magnificent-a-wonderful-encyclical/>>, accessed 30 March 2022.

<sup>52</sup>LS, §48.

<sup>53</sup>Daniel Patrick Castillo, *An Ecological Theology of Liberation: Salvation and Political Ecology* (New York: Orbis Books, 2019) at 154.

<sup>54</sup>Philip Goodchild, ‘Creation, Sin, and Debt: A Response to the Papal Encyclical *Laudato Si'*’, *Environmental Humanities*, 8/2 (2016), 270-76 at 275.

<sup>55</sup>Greenpeace, ‘ALL for the Amazon’ [online petition], <<https://act.greenpeace.org/page/39922/petition/1>>, accessed 01 May 2022.

<sup>56</sup>LS, §105.

financial gain, which fail to take the context into account, let alone the effects on human dignity and the natural environment.<sup>57</sup>

For Leonardo Boff, liberation theologian and one of the pioneering voices of eco-theology, analyzes the crossing from a *paradigm of dominus* to the *paradigm of frater*; thus, he suggests the need “to move from a capitalist society of overproduction of material goods to a society that sustains all of life, with human-spiritual, intangible values such as love, solidarity, compassion, fair measure, respect and the care especially of the most vulnerable.”<sup>58</sup> However, Pope Francis in *Fratelli Tutti* simplifies his criticism appropriately by saying: “The right of some to free enterprise or market freedom cannot supersede the rights of peoples and the dignity of the poor, or, for that matter, respect for the natural environment.”<sup>59</sup>

The impact of humanity’s ecological damage is irreversible in many respects. This anthropogenic footprint is accelerated by the treatment of development as the improvement of the quality of life for the wealthy few—evidenced via signs of excessiveness where nature is entirely sacrificed for consumption above human need.

### **The Anthropocene Parallels in *Laudato Si*’**

The *Laudato Si*’ encyclical, identifies the following Anthropocene-related references, namely: tyrannical anthropocentrism<sup>60</sup>, distorted anthropocentrism<sup>61</sup>, modern anthropocentrism<sup>62</sup>, excessive anthropocentrism<sup>63</sup>, and misguided anthropocentrism<sup>64</sup>. The diversity of terms employed may not provide the exact meaning of *Anthropocene*,

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<sup>57</sup>LS, §56.

<sup>58</sup>Leonardo Boff, ‘Uma outra agenda (mundial): libertemos a vida ou um outro paradigma civilizatório?’ [online article], (6 May 2022) <<https://leonardoboff.org/artigos/>>, accessed 07 May 22.

<sup>59</sup>Pope Francis, ‘Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship’, *Papal Encyclical* [online document], (3 October 2020) <[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20201003\\_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html)>, §122, accessed 21 April 2022.

<sup>60</sup>LS, §68.

<sup>61</sup>LS, §69.

<sup>62</sup>LS, §115.

<sup>63</sup>LS, §116.

<sup>64</sup>LS, §§ 118, 119, 122.

but clearly Pope Francis provides the qualifying language structure for the negative implications of the Anthropocene's impacts. These critical descriptions of the *anthropocene-related* human praxis are taken to convey an inclusive unity of both humans and non-humans—belonging to one common home.

### Excessive Anthropocene

The *excessive anthropocene* is understood in the background of *modern anthropocentrism*<sup>65</sup>, reducing the world as a mere object and the treatment of the natural world as a subject to human disposition, subliminally influencing modern economic and market systems. Modern anthropocentrism flows into a more damaging conduct on how the intrinsic dignity of the world is thus compromised with regard to the utilitarian human disposition of unlimited power.

Pope Francis provides the ethical framework for a Christian Anthropocene complex by citing the excessiveness of the Anthropocene's impacts, he emphasizes:

Modernity has been marked by an excessive anthropocentrism which today, under another guise, continues to stand in the way of shared understanding and of any effort to strengthen social bonds. The time has come to pay renewed attention to reality and the limits it imposes; this in turn is the condition for a more sound and fruitful development of individuals and society[...]<sup>66</sup>

Excessiveness in human consumption, often at the full expense of nature, exploits the earth of natural resources *for profit*. This accelerated footprint brings an ecological destruction that makes the so-called 'improved quality of life' nothing but pseudo-improvement. The kind of excessiveness humanity shown creates a catastrophic character of the current *Anthropocene* epoch. Pope Francis puts it very clearly: "when human beings place themselves at the center, they give absolute priority to immediate convenience and all else becomes relative."<sup>67</sup> Excessive anthropocentrism remains relevant, as reflected in the message of Pope Francis in 2021:

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<sup>65</sup>LS, §115.

<sup>66</sup>LS, §116.

<sup>67</sup>LS, §122.

We see the unjust consequences of some aspects of our current economic systems and numerous catastrophic climate crises that produce grave effects on human societies and even mass extinction of species[...]<sup>68</sup>

***The following are the markers of excessive Anthropocene:***

(a) Tyrannical anthropocentrism<sup>69</sup> describes the human failure to assume the responsibility to care for creation. Pope Francis emphasizes the importance of the care for creation<sup>70</sup>, responsible stewardship<sup>71</sup>, and closer, more inclusive living with other beings. Augustine brings a more reflective tone by considering the goodness of the Creator manifesting the beauty of creation. He says: “You, therefore, Lord, made these things; Thou who art beautiful, for they are beautiful; Thou who art good, for they are good; Thou who art, for they are.”<sup>72</sup>

(b) Distorted anthropocentrism depicts humans’ excessive use of the earth’s resources, with little to no recognition of the worth of other living beings. One warning against distorted anthropocentrism comes from the Christian attitude and treatment of non-humans in the 1980 document of German Bishops, which highlights, “the need to free ourselves from the dependence of creation.”<sup>73</sup>

(c) Excessive anthropocentrism indicates the human tendencies to rationalize “dominion” in any manner convenient, even at the expense of protecting nature<sup>74</sup>, or by false or superficial ecology.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>Pope Francis, ‘Message for the Launching of the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration’ [online document], (27 May 2021) <[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2021/documents/papa-francesco\\_20210604\\_messaggio-ecosistema.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2021/documents/papa-francesco_20210604_messaggio-ecosistema.html)>, accessed 02 May 2022.

<sup>69</sup>LS, §68.

<sup>70</sup>LS, §211.

<sup>71</sup>LS, §116.

<sup>72</sup>Augustine, *Confessions* [online], <<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/110111.htm>>, *conf.* 11,6, accessed 04 March 2022.

<sup>73</sup>German Bishops’ Conference, ‘Zukunft der Schöpfung – Zukunft der Menschheit. Einklärung der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz zu Fragen der Umwelt und der Energieversorgung’ [online document], (1980) <<https://www.nachhaltigkeit.info/media/1294745787phpxOOD7y.pdf>> II, 2, accessed 02 May 2022.

<sup>74</sup>LS, §116.

<sup>75</sup>LS, §59.

(d) Misguided anthropocentrism implies human-centeredness in all aspects of the relationship between human beings, society and nature; when everything becomes relative, it is advocating the doctrine of human supremacy.<sup>76</sup>

### **Non-excessive Anthropocene**

Pope Francis never mentions a specific definition of *non-excessive Anthropocene* in the encyclical, but he insists that humans must respect the laws of nature and the fragile equilibria with other creatures<sup>77</sup>; and demands that “man must therefore respect the particular goodness of every creature, to avoid any disordered use of things.”<sup>78</sup> Thus, implying the parameters of anthropogenic attitudes within the limits of man’s moral capacity not to exploit nature, while relatively affording the necessity of basic human needs.

Within the Anthropocene discussion, the concept of “*good Anthropocene*” also exists, especially among the ecomodernists, who are espousing the optimism despite the unending ecological destruction. Clive Hamilton underscores that man is now destined to save the earth, and he calls it their responsibility.<sup>79</sup>

While Timothy Morton’s consideration is to expand the definition of Being, that it is “permeated with other beings, physically and experientially and everything else.”<sup>80</sup>

It is not rather accurate to describe the non-excessive description of the Anthropocene as “reversible” attempts on the anthropogenic impacts on ecology, but it should be understood within the moral frame of the human responsibility in restoring creation. Though we can deduce the non-excessive description from the totality of Pope Francis’ principle of man’s recognition on the intrinsic dignity of nature. Markus Vogt

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<sup>76</sup>Eileen Crist, ‘On the Poverty of Our Nomenclature’, *Environmental Humanities*, 3/1 (1 May 2013), 129-147 at 130.

<sup>77</sup>LS, §68.

<sup>78</sup>LS, §69.

<sup>79</sup>Clive Hamilton, ‘Human Destiny in the Anthropocene’, in Clive Hamilton et al. (eds.), *The Anthropocene and the global environmental crisis* (London: Routledge, 2015), 32-43 at 40.

<sup>80</sup>Timothy Morton, *Humankind: Solidarity with Non-Human People* (United Kingdom: Verso, 2019) at 145.

specifically mentions “enlightened anthropocentrism”.<sup>81</sup> He says, “to the human as a moral subject is indispensable for the substantiation of ethics... not only human interests matter but also the graduated intrinsic value of creatures and nature.”<sup>82</sup>

Pope Francis indicates the point of failure of humanity: the excesses of its needs and of the mentality that technological progress is unlimited.<sup>83</sup> Notwithstanding, he still insists on the importance of human conviction to address the ecological destruction.<sup>84</sup> This is needed for humanity to recover from the ecological destruction.

## **Beyond the Anthropocene**

The ethical proposal of Pope Francis to address the acceleration of human impacts, technological advancement, and excessive economic dominion to the detriment of creation is simply to discover the richness of Christian spirituality.<sup>85</sup> This is the kind of Christian spirituality not defined by complexities, but rather by markers of universal virtues, namely: quality of life, growth and moderation, and simplicity.<sup>86</sup>

Francis never fails to point out ecological conversion and ecological spirituality as formative solutions to ecological degradation. While it is important for him to take a pro-active response, he maintains that “a spirituality can motivate us to a more passionate concern for the protection of our world.”<sup>87</sup>

Again, Vogt suggests the holistic ethical understanding of *human ecology* as

A systemic approach that embraces ecology as a scientific discipline and a systemic understanding of society and its complex interrelations to the dynamics of the Earth System; it functions as

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<sup>81</sup>Markus Vogt, ‘Human Ecology as a Key Discipline of Environmental Ethics in the Anthropocene’, in Celia Deane-Drummond et al. (eds.), *Religion in the Anthropocene* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017), 235-252 at 247.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid.

<sup>83</sup>LS, §128.

<sup>84</sup>LS, §64.

<sup>85</sup>LS §222.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid.

<sup>87</sup>LS §216.



a normative approach to thinking and acting in light of the social, ecological, and spiritual relatedness of all human beings.<sup>88</sup>

Pope Francis descriptively provides the events, impacts, destruction (and even solutions) of the Anthropocene realities—as entirely expressing “human ecology”. Thus, the recognition of the Anthropocene artifacts vis-à-vis “human ecology” can contribute to a better understanding of the “integral ecology” framework.

In the entirety of the Anthropocene discussion, Celia Deane-Drummond proposes the need for a theological anthropology to better understand the human dynamism in its response to human and technological progress, she says:

A theological anthropology that retains a qualified version of humanity made in the image of God will insist on the dignity of each and every person in developing a human ecology that is capable of facing the enormous ecological challenges that confront this and future generations.<sup>89</sup>

### **Limits and Critique of Pope Francis’ Anthropocene Concepts**

In contrast to the emphasis on human responsibility, interconnectedness, and a clarion call *to hear the cry of the earth* is the ability to provide the important elements to address the ecological crisis. Nevertheless, there are still elements of anthropocentric tendencies that need to be clarified, as to merit consistency in language and framework acceptable in either scientific or social discussion. Many desire more eco-centric language from the Pope, which they hope might entirely break the Anthropocene bias still existing in Christian traditions and praxis.

#### **Determining Population Growth as Part of an Anthropocene Acceleration**

The scientific bodies have emphasized the need to address the interconnecting elements of population growth, environmental

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<sup>88</sup>Vogt, ‘Human Ecology’, 246.

<sup>89</sup>Celia Deane-Drummond, ‘Evolution: A Theology of Niche Construction for the Twenty-First Century’, in Celia Deane-Drummond and Rebecca Artinian-Kaiser (eds.), *Theology and Ecology Across the Disciplines* (London, UK: T&T Clark, 2018), 241-256 at 256.

degradation, and climate change<sup>90</sup> to systematically deal with the climate crisis. Some scientists criticize Pope Francis' failure to address the linkages between sustainable development and demographic growth.<sup>91</sup> According to these critics, the resources of the planet and its ecosystem are depleted by the needs of the growing population.

### Finding the Appropriate Place for Non-humans

The encyclical seeks to fill the gap between humans and non-humans. In the section on *new biological technologies*, Pope Francis tends to allow *human exceptionalism*, with regard to using plants and animals for experimentation, stating that it is "permissible when it pertains to the necessities of human life."<sup>92</sup> This would mean that the Roman Catholic Church is changing its ethical position on genetic engineering and animal research. It would appear that there are inconsistencies in the encyclical's concern for the loss of biodiversity, extinction of species<sup>93</sup>, and caring for ecosystems<sup>94</sup> as the distinct markers of cry of the earth. These inconsistencies must be at par with the relative direction of the encyclical on appropriating human needs and the regulated use of the environmental resources.<sup>95</sup>

In deep ecology, it places non-humans within the salvific event of Jesus' incarnation.<sup>96</sup> With this, Anders Melin, an environmental ethicist, suggests an eschatological perspective for humans; he writes "The resurrection of Christ inaugurated an age of new possibilities, in which the whole of creation will be liberated. In the new creation, non-human creatures as well will live a form of resurrected life."<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>90</sup>United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), 'Population Division, Global Population Growth and Sustainable Development 2021' [online document], <[https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/undesd\\_pd\\_2022\\_global\\_population\\_growth.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/undesd_pd_2022_global_population_growth.pdf)>, accessed 03 May 2022.

<sup>91</sup>Paul R. Ehrlich and John Harte, 'Biophysical limits, women's rights and the climate encyclical', *Nature Climate Change*, 5 (2015), 904–905 at 904.

<sup>92</sup>LS, §130.

<sup>93</sup>LS, §64.

<sup>94</sup>LS, §36.

<sup>95</sup>LS, §32.

<sup>96</sup>Matthew Eaton, 'Beyond Human Exceptionalism: Christology in the Anthropocene', in Celia Deane-Drummond et al. (eds.), *Religion in the Anthropocene* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017), 202-217 at 213.

<sup>97</sup>Anders Melin, 'Protection of Threatened Species in the Anthropocene: A Theological-Ethical Perspective', in Celia Deane-Drummond et al. (eds.), *Religion in the Anthropocene* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017), 253-266 at 259.

## Enhancing the Creation Language

One of the positive contributions of the encyclical to the whole Christian ecological vision is the ecumenical approach in trying to gather the biblical, theological, and magisterial documents not just within the Roman Catholic Church, but also from other Christian sources. The materialization of the emphasis on the interrelated relationships between God, human beings, and the whole of creation broadens the creation language in the book of Genesis.<sup>98</sup> Likewise, Pope Francis brings a definite articulation of the Genesis account of creation that will have an impact on the constricted Anthropocene mentality of many believers and faith communities. The pope says:

The harmony between the Creator, humanity and creation as a whole was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations. This in turn distorted our mandate to “have dominion” over the earth (cf. *Gen* 1:28), to “till it and keep it” (*Gen* 2:15).<sup>99</sup>

In this text, Pope Francis presents the underlying false anthropology and distorted view of the relationship between humanity and the natural world. As Karen Bloomquist, Lutheran theologian and pastor, suggests, “we must move beyond narrow anthropocentric views of life, and embrace more interconnected views in which God, human beings and the rest of creation are intimately related.”<sup>100</sup>

In the whole characterization of the human roots of the ecological crisis is presented within the ecological vision of Pope Francis, via the backdrop of the interconnecting elements of the Anthropocene concept and the encyclical.

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<sup>98</sup>*LS*, §66

<sup>99</sup>*LS*, §66.

<sup>100</sup>Karen L. Bloomquist, ‘God, Creation and Climate Change’, in Karen L. Bloomquist (ed.), *God, Creation And Climate Change: Spiritual And Ethical Perspectives* (Minneapolis: Lutheran World Federation, Lutheran University Press, 2009), 13-26 at 26.

## ANTHROPOCENE AND ITS ECUMENICAL RECEPTION: CONTRIBUTING TO THE GROWTH OF ECOLOGICAL THEOLOGY IN CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

Upon the publication of the encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, there was a rekindling of ecological interest from within the Roman Catholic and other faith communities, different religions, and in other disciplines. Indeed, it is a groundbreaking document that offers ecumenical and interreligious motivations to care for the Earth.

This chapter brings in the ecumenical reception and implications of the Anthropocene discussion in *Laudato Si'*, which is valuable to the ecological growth of the Christian communities. In order to facilitate the course of the presentation, this chapter classifies the tripartite dimension most important to reception in Christian communities: ecumenical faith, ecological action, and sustainability.

### Ecumenical Faith Dimension

In the context of *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis brings the ecumenical dimension of his eco-theological vision by presenting “Our Common Home” as an integral description of the earth, of the cosmos, and even as an alternative rendering of heaven. Across the texts in the encyclical, Pope Francis articulates “our common home” as a) where we can see mistreatment and disrepair<sup>101</sup>; b) where we live in a common home which God has entrusted to us<sup>102</sup>; c) where our planet is a homeland, of which, humanity is one people living in a common home<sup>103</sup>; and d) where our common home is in heaven.<sup>104</sup> These layers of meaning for “our common home” reveal Pope Francis’ purpose in writing—to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home.<sup>105</sup> Aside from providing the ecumenical identity of the encyclical, Pope Francis reiterates an ecumenical challenge for church communities.

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<sup>101</sup>LS, §53, 61.

<sup>102</sup>LS, §155, 232

<sup>103</sup>LS, §164.

<sup>104</sup>LS, §243.

<sup>105</sup>LS, §3.

Pope Francis opens an ecumenical “space” in presenting his eco-theological vision by acknowledging Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew’s contribution to the ethical and spiritual roots of environmental problems.<sup>106</sup> This kind of exchange shows a common concern to protect the earth from both leaders; Kevin Mongrain sees this unique exchange between the religious leaders as endeavoring to gain respect from environmentalists and other church institutions as credible and sophisticated participants in efforts to save the Earth from humanly made catastrophe.<sup>107</sup>

The approaches by churches seeking to answer the varied ecological questions are generally considered “ecumenically” as responses. In 1985, both the Council of German Evangelical Churches (EKD) and the German Bishops’ Conference (DBK) released a joint document entitled *Verantwortung wahrnehmen für die Schöpfung*<sup>108</sup> embracing an ecumenical approach to take responsibility in caring for creation; the document reads:

The understanding of God’s creation revealed by revelation first opens up a view of our origin, of the radical connection between human beings as physical beings and creatures. The rediscovery of human responsibility for nature and the experience of a deeply troubled conscience in the face of nature’s transgressions cannot be redressed by well-meaning protestations. Rather, man must take responsibility for the disastrous effects of his actions and fully accept his responsibility in the future.<sup>109</sup>

This statement articulates the faith dimension in creation as an ecumenical task, insinuating moral responsibility. Notably, this joint ecumenical initiative additionally shows how institutional churches in a specific country can make progress in ecological care outside of the global organizational structures, like the Vatican or World Council of Churches, with a deliberate understanding of the Anthropocene concept.

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<sup>106</sup>LS, §9.

<sup>107</sup>Kevin Mongrain, ‘The burden of guilt and the imperative of reform: Pope Francis and Patriarch Bartholomew take up the challenge of re-spiritualizing Christianity in the Anthropocene age’, *Horizons*, 44/1 (2017), 80-107 at 88.

<sup>108</sup>Evangelical Church in Germany and the German Bishops’ Conference, ‘Verantwortung wahrnehmen für die Schöpfung’ [online document], (14 May 1985) <<https://www.ekd.de/23006.htm>>, accessed 26 April 2022.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., §66.

Generally, there is a growing ecumenical treatment on the ecological question regarding the Anthropocene impacts. During the finalization of the Paris Agreement texts in 2015, the WCC issued a statement entitled “Statement of Faith and Spiritual Leaders: On behalf of different world’s Faith and Religious Traditions.” In this statement, the commitment to climate action reads:

Be responsible for the Earth, our common home, in our lives as individuals and in our faith communities... Undertake a constant effort to raise climate awareness within our communities, as an expression of our care for the Earth, deepening our understanding of the interconnectedness of human beings and nature, building capacity, and advocating for climate justice with our governments.<sup>110</sup>

The statement not only expresses the collective voice of churches and faith communities to commit a holistic approach to care for the earth, but it also reflects a unified engagement on climate justice in the public space.

The Manifesto for an Ecological Reformation of Christianity, or The Volos Call<sup>111</sup>, signed in 2016, calls for an ecological reformation in Christianity as a matter of repentance, conversion, and renewal for all Christian traditions. The statement insists on an ecumenical approach while acknowledging the progress made by the work of Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew.

In clearer language, the WCC, published another document in 2019 entitled the ‘Wuppertal Call’, encouraging the global ecumenical movement, Christian world communions, and all other churches to plan for a decade of ecological learning, confessing, and comprehensive action.<sup>112</sup> The document reads:

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<sup>110</sup>World Council of Churches (WCC), ‘Statement of Faith and Spiritual Leaders: On behalf of different world’s Faith and Religious Traditions’, *Addressed To the High-Level Ministerial Segment of the 21st Session of the Conference of the Parties* [online document], (8 December 2015) <[https://unfccc.int/files/meetings/paris\\_nov\\_2015/application/pdf/cop21cmp1\\_hls\\_statement\\_wcc.pdf](https://unfccc.int/files/meetings/paris_nov_2015/application/pdf/cop21cmp1_hls_statement_wcc.pdf)>, accessed 13 March 2022.

<sup>111</sup>Ernst Conradie, Ekaterini Tsalamponi and Dietrich Werner, ‘Manifesto on Ecological Reformation of Christianity: The Volos Call,’ in Dietrich Werner and Elisabeth Jeglitzka (eds.), *Eco-Theology, Climate Justice and Food Security* (Global 14; Geneva: Globethics.net, 2016), 99-106 at 100.

<sup>112</sup>Andrianos, Louk et al., ‘Kairos for Creation: Confessing Hope for the Earth: The Wuppertal Call’, *Contributions and Recommendations From an International Conference on Eco-theology and Ethics of Sustainability, Wuppertal, Germany* [online document], (16-19 June 2019) <[https://www.brot-fuer-die-welt.de/fileadmin/mediapool/2\\_Downloads/en/20\\_About\\_Us/Wuppertal\\_Kairos\\_for\\_Creation\\_Publication\\_01.pdf](https://www.brot-fuer-die-welt.de/fileadmin/mediapool/2_Downloads/en/20_About_Us/Wuppertal_Kairos_for_Creation_Publication_01.pdf)>, 11, accessed 03 March 2022.

The delicate systems of balances in creation has been disturbed to an unprecedented extent in the Anthropocene... We have been unable to hold together ecumenical concerns over justice amid poverty, unemployment and inequality, over a participatory society amid various forms of violent conflict and over sustainability amid ecological destruction. Although humans have not contributed equally to the root causes of this crisis, as Christians we come together to confess our complicity and bondage to sin [...].<sup>113</sup>

The ‘Wuppertal Call’ challenges the churches to embrace comprehensive action with greater awareness of the specifically Anthropocene nature of ecological disruption, and connects this action to Christian ethics.

### Ecological Action Dimension

The response of church communities to *Laudato Si’* is overwhelming; as previously mentioned, Pope Francis’ ecological vision was maximized in statements by world leaders, international organizations, and groups across denominational identities. In bringing his message closer to his audience, Pope Francis directly pointed out both the interconnectedness of social and ecological crisis affecting humanity, in bolder and stronger tones, and offered basic and concrete solutions—from planting trees to demanding adequate agreements from international bodies.<sup>114</sup>

The Anthropocene understanding frames the call of *Laudato Si’* to end anthropocentrism, since the encyclical focuses on human activity as the core of environmental degradation; albeit impacting the extinction of other species in the whole Earth system. Advancing in this argument, Pope Francis never fails to highlight the broader ecological dimension of his Ecological Theology. For example, in his 2015 official visit to the United Nations Office in New York he announced:

It must be stated that a true “right of the environment” does exist, for two reasons. First, because we human beings are part of the environment. We live in communion with it, since the environment itself entails ethical limits which human activity must acknowledge

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<sup>113</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>114</sup>LS, §166.

and respect... Second, because every creature, particularly a living creature, has an intrinsic value...<sup>115</sup>

The Holy See's delegation to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of Parties has diligently brought the ecological vision of Pope Francis in almost all the conferences since the 2015 COP21 in Paris, France. In the latest 2021 COP26 in Glasgow, the introductory statement of the Holy See's delegation emphasized the human face of the climate crisis, especially its impact on the poorest<sup>116</sup>, and it insisted on the need "to limit the rise of the global average temperature to 1.5 °C above preindustrial levels".<sup>117</sup> The framing of the Anthropocene understanding can guide the level of engagement of faith communities in the conduct of ecological dialogue with international organizations and bodies.

The Anthropocene understanding amplifies the call for climate justice, highlighting the increasing environmental destruction and loss of lives affecting people and communities in the global south and in the vulnerable island nations. In the context of climate justice, Pope Francis not only affirms the disproportionate effects of the climate deterioration, but he also calls for a sense of urgency on the climate crisis: "this century may well witness extraordinary climate change and an unprecedented destruction of ecosystems, with serious consequences for all of us."<sup>118</sup>

In the UNFCCC process, the *Loss and Damage* framework is the mechanism to address the anthropogenic impacts of climate change, including impacts of extreme weather events and slow onset events in developing countries that are particularly vulnerable.<sup>119</sup> The WCC COP23 statement reads, "It is therefore a matter of justice that wealthy

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<sup>115</sup>Pope Francis, 'Meeting with the Members of the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization', [online document], (25 September 2015) <[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150925\\_onu-visita.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150925_onu-visita.html)>, accessed 14 April 2022.

<sup>116</sup>Holy See Press Office, 'Holy See Statement on COP26' [online article], (11 November 2021) <<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2021/11/11/211111e.html>>, accessed 09 April 2022.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid.

<sup>118</sup>LS, §24.

<sup>119</sup>United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), 'Loss and Damage Online Guide' [online document], (May 2018) <[https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/Online\\_guide\\_on\\_loss\\_and\\_damage-May\\_2018.pdf](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/Online_guide_on_loss_and_damage-May_2018.pdf)>, accessed 07 May 2022.



nations responsible for the bulk of global emissions provide financial and other forms of support to income-poor, vulnerable countries...<sup>120</sup> The accountability of rich nations has been a continuous demand, not only among climate justice advocates, but also from church and interfaith organizations, even at the level of international solidarity campaigns. The 2019 Pastoral Statement by the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines reads,

Climate-related disasters threaten us all. The reality of the climate crisis, proven by the catastrophic impact of typhoons and other human induced-disasters, has made us aware that the time to act is now, not tomorrow.<sup>121</sup>

The Anthropocene understanding defines the ecological vision of Pope Francis; he elucidated this in the fourth chapter of the encyclical, defining integral ecology as a vision capable of taking into account every aspect of the global crisis.<sup>122</sup> The setting to discern the climate crisis rests on the interconnectivity of the lived context present in environmental, economic, social, and cultural ecology; often reflecting a degradation of nature and culture.<sup>123</sup> To present a practical approach on the understanding of integral ecology, Pope Francis emphasizes both the understanding of human ecology, encompassing the importance of the ecology of daily life and its integral relationship with the environment and other living beings; and the importance of the common good, comprising the promotion of solidarity and the preferential option for the poorest.<sup>124</sup>

Moreover, the applicability of integral ecology in the environmental discussion can be found in Pope Francis' resoluteness to emphasize the need for international agreements, and for nations and institutions to connect the intimate relationship between the poor and

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<sup>120</sup>World Council of Churches (WCC), 'To Bonn and Beyond: Act Now with Justice and Peace', *Interfaith Statement to the Plenary of the High Level Ministerial Segment (COP23)* [online document], (16 November 2017) <[https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/Document/COP23\\_WCCStatement\\_Final.pdf](https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/Document/COP23_WCCStatement_Final.pdf)>, accessed 29 February 2022.

<sup>121</sup>Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, 'An Urgent Call for Ecological Conversion, Hope in the Face of Climate Emergency', *Pastoral Statement* [online document], (16 July 2019) <<https://cbcponline.net/an-urgent-call-for-ecological-conversion-hope-in-the-face-of-climate-emergency/>>, accessed 25 February 2022.

<sup>122</sup>LS, §137.

<sup>123</sup>LS, §146.

<sup>124</sup>LS, §§147-148.

the fragility of the planet.<sup>125</sup> Otherwise, the human environment and the natural environment will deteriorate together; to prevent environmental degradation the human and social degradation must be addressed.<sup>126</sup>

The Anthropocene understanding advances the direction for climate action. The involvement of faith actors and movements has been growing with greater influence from within jurisdictional spheres to the platform of climate action. Greater responses from across faith institutions are happening. In the last quarter of 2021, the *Laudato Si' Movement*, a global organization which focuses on sustaining the message of *Laudato Si'*, reported that there are already present from six continents, seventy-two (72) faith institutions and affiliate organizations worth \$4.2 billion in assets, committing to divestment plan from fossil fuels in their financial management and social responsibility as a deliberate ecological response.<sup>127</sup>

Just as there are large challenges in the international arena of climate campaigns, there are similar challenges in the local communities facing inhuman impacts of the climate crisis. As Pope Francis calls for a concerted solidarity to take action in ecological response, church communities can make a difference. Currently in the Philippines, faith communities conduct protests against the unceasing mining operations<sup>128</sup> and other forms of environmental abuses, including the continuing harassment and assassinations of environmental defenders.<sup>129</sup>

More recently, the “Faith and Science: Towards COP26” event, organized by the ambassadors of Great Britain and Italy to the Holy See and the Vatican, brought together scientists and religious leaders from all over the world to call on the international community to step up climate

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<sup>125</sup>LS, §16.

<sup>126</sup>LS, §48.

<sup>127</sup>Jonathan Braden, ‘Faith institutions announce largest-ever divestment from fossil fuels ahead of COP26’ [online article], (26 October 2021) <<https://laudatosimovement.org/news/faith-institutions-announce-largest-ever-divestment-ahead-of-cop26/>>, accessed 13 March 2022.

<sup>128</sup>Mark Z. Saludes, ‘Earth Day 2022: Fisherfolk decry economic impact of black sand mining operation’ [online news], (22 April 2022) <<https://oeconomedia.org/news/earth-day-2022-fisherfolk-decry-economic-impact-of-black-sand-mining-operation/>>, accessed 04 May 2022.

<sup>129</sup>Licas News, ‘Attacks against environmental defenders quadrupled ahead of Philippine polls’ [online news], (3 March 2022) <<https://www.licas.news/2022/03/03/attacks-against-environmental-defenders-quadrupled-ahead-of-philippine-polls/>>, accessed 24 April 2022.

action. In this meeting, a Joint Appeal addressed to the participants of COP26 was signed, part of which reads:

[...] we underline the importance of taking far-reaching environmental action within our own institutions and communities, informed by science and based on religious wisdom. While calling on governments and international organizations to be ambitious, we also recognize the major role we play.<sup>130</sup>

The ecological action dimension provides the context of reception among faith communities on how concrete actions give impetus to answer the varied ecological questions related to Anthropocene.

### Sustainability Dimension

Sustainability is understood as a concept to mean that the needs of the present generation are generated while protecting the needs of future generations and respecting the ecological planetary boundaries of the earth.<sup>131</sup> Related to this definition is the pastoral appeal of Pope Francis that calls “for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet.”<sup>132</sup> This is precisely his principal reason for identifying the roots of the ecological crisis in both the human activity and the technocratic paradigm; both of which are becoming concerns also for future generations.

The leaders of major Christian Churches, namely, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, Pope Francis, and Archbishop of Canterbury Justin issued a historic joint statement for the Protection of Creation, acknowledging the role churches have played in maximizing the earth’s resources at the expense of future generations. Additionally, the statement proposes the importance of sustainability as an ecological commitment for the future, it reads:

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<sup>130</sup>Holy See Press Office, ‘Faith and Science: Towards COP26’ [online article], (04 October 2021), <<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2021/10/04/211004a.html>>, accessed 27 March 2022.

<sup>131</sup>Astrid Quick, ‘Lent to us is the star on which we live: The Agenda 2030: A challenge to the churches: a discussion paper’, *EKD-Texte* [online document], (2018) <[https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/Document/ekd\\_texte\\_130\\_en\\_2018.pdf](https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/Document/ekd_texte_130_en_2018.pdf)>, 23, accessed 03 April 2022.

<sup>132</sup>*LS*, §14.

Each of us, individually, must take responsibility for the ways we use our resources. This path requires an ever-closer collaboration among all churches in their commitment to care for creation... This is the first time that the three of us feel compelled to address together the urgency of environmental sustainability, its impact on persistent poverty, and the importance of global cooperation... Our children's future and the future of our common home depend on it.<sup>133</sup>

The sustainability element in the Anthropocene concept calls for responsible stewardship. Key to this understanding of stewardship is how important the ecosystem is to the entire earth and to the future of humanity.<sup>134</sup> The right relationship between the earth and humanity must exist. But Ernst Conradie, the ecumenical eco-theologian, warns about the dangers of a critical notion of stewardship assuming human supremacy among the species.<sup>135</sup> In the encyclical, Pope Francis prefers to use the term 'care for creation' instead of 'stewardship'; the term is more inclusive and profound for both humans and non-humans.

The sustainability element in the Anthropocene concept responds to the rhetoric of the global systems. One important element in the sustainability understanding of the Anthropocene is the viewing of political climates as measures for environmental concerns and sustainability. Pope Francis underlines the failures of political and economic systems to protect the common home, prioritizing financial gain at the expense of human dignity and the natural environment.<sup>136</sup> Along with this, he criticizes World Summits concerning the environment for failing to reach meaningful and effective global agreements on the environment.<sup>137</sup> This can be seen from the refusal of rich countries to take drastic action in their climate commitment; for example, for failing to comply with the climate pledge of \$100 billion a year that will be made available to countries in the Global South impacted by climate

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<sup>133</sup>The Holy See (Vatican), 'A Joint Message for the Protection of Creation', *Pontifical Message* [online document], (1 September 2021) <<https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2021/documents/20210901-messaggio-protezionedelcreato.html>>, accessed 03 April 2022.

<sup>134</sup>LS, §38.

<sup>135</sup>Conradie, *Christianity and Ecological Theology*, 129.

<sup>136</sup>LS, §56.

<sup>137</sup>LS, §166.

change.<sup>138</sup> Leonardo Boff, in his critique to COP26 concurs: ‘This is how they create obstacles to consensus and put the brakes on more drastic measures in the face of the evident deterioration of the Earth’s climate balance.’<sup>139</sup>

The sustainability element in the Anthropocene concept reflects a transformative spirituality. Important to the response of faith communities is to be able to discern the loss of ecosystem resulting from human impacts, not only from scientific understanding, but also from faith perspectives. Pope Francis presents a profound ecological spirituality with a mark of trinitarian motif, stating: “to live in communion with God, with others and with all creatures.”<sup>140</sup> Churches and faith communities are credible spaces of ecological witnessing in a world where the utilitarian culture continues to destroy nature without limits. The sustainability task of faith communities is to create exemplar spaces where ecological-culture and ecological-education become deeper components of spiritual awareness, essential to a transformative living.

Thus, this tripartite dimension forms the whole ecumenical reception of faith communities on the relevance of Pope Francis’ encyclical, *Laudato Si’*—contributing to the growth of Ecological Theology.

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<sup>138</sup>Linda Lap, ‘COP26: A Success or a Failure’ [online article], (16 November 2021) <[https://www.cordaaid.org/en/news/cop26-a-success-or-a-failure/?gclid=CjwK-CAjwp7eUBhBeEiwAZbHwkU3nFouwUD66Zqx1JIBtGLSRiTwhK7yUzL5Bm3Y-6A5bUIEdu0Er1tBoCrAAQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.cordaaid.org/en/news/cop26-a-success-or-a-failure/?gclid=CjwK-CAjwp7eUBhBeEiwAZbHwkU3nFouwUD66Zqx1JIBtGLSRiTwhK7yUzL5Bm3Y-6A5bUIEdu0Er1tBoCrAAQAvD_BwE)>, accessed 27 February 2022.

<sup>139</sup>Leonardo Boff, ‘The Big Player Absent at COP26 in Glasgow’ [online article], (22 October 2021) <<https://leonardoboff.org/2021/10/22/the-big-player-absent-at-cop26-in-glasgow/>>, accessed 02 May 2022.

<sup>140</sup>LS, §240.

## CONCLUSION

This study affirms substantiated reasoning for Christian churches not only to accept the reality of the climate crisis and the alarming situation of climate emergency but also to recognize the human impacts as the root of the ecological destruction—as the mark of Anthropocene. Pope Francis provides a thorough articulation of the “Anthropocene”, synchronizing the relevance of faith in the Anthropocene epoch. This, he underlines in a deeper understanding of the relevance of faith; in the intrinsic dignity of all creatures both humans and non-humans; and in the active role of organized bodies (scientific, environmental institutions and organizations, and faith communities) to provide integral solutions to the ecological crisis.

Since its publication the *Laudato Si'* encyclical has been a leading example in form, content, and pastoral engagement for Christian ecological response. Its reception from faith communities expresses the ecumenical relevance of Pope Francis' ecological vision highlighting human ecology within the panorama of climate emergency facing the planet and affecting everyone. Likewise, the work of faith leaders expressed in magisterial texts and documents which communicate the Anthropocene concept, is important in the formative development of every believer, and of the institutional ecological framework. Faith communities and actors afford to bring a common Anthropocene understanding into the ecological framework of churches and in their distinct faith identities. Indeed, the richness of Christian faith *from biblical sources to greening practices* as conveyed in *Laudato Si'* can contribute to the development of the Anthropocene understanding.

While ecumenical and interreligious groups, local churches, and grassroots faith communities strengthen their ecological direction and commitment; Pope Francis illustrates clearly the benefits of scientific and research data valuable to ecological advocacy. *Laudato Si'* undeniably brings the needed pattern of dialogue between climate science and religion—where theological and ethical responses contribute to a broader Anthropocene understanding.

Thus, the continued ecumenical engagement related to the response from faith communities is necessary for the public engagement of the whole climate change process—from local to global platforms. This

study proves that faith communities both in the spirit of ecumenical and interreligious relations jointly embrace active responsibility to address the Anthropocene-related impacts on our planet and continuously move toward building the future of the planet.

Nonetheless, further research must be pursued on how faith communities advance in the direction of providing policies and methodologies in climate discussions that address Anthropocene-related impacts in global and local contexts.

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## **The Book of Creation: On Augustine's Ecological Thoughts**

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### ***Abstract***

*Augustine of Hippo obviously did not think in contemporary ecological categories when he wrote his reflections on creation the way Pope Francis does when he employs the Church's moral and theological doctrines to current ecological problems in his Encyclical Laudato Si'. However, an impartial and unbiased reading of the writings of Augustine could lead one to discover a rich source of essential and indisputable doctrines that should guide the praxis of a true Christian ecology. This article offers some of Augustine's important propositions and basic principles that must not be disregarded, if ecology must be situated within the correct Christian parameters, and to avoid all forms of 'perverted ecology' tainted with concealed pantheism or panentheism.*

### **The Book of Creatures**

Augustine teaches that everything in this universe has its own place in the divine ordering of things and its own story in the 'great book of nature.' Nothing is superfluous. This doctrine is in line with Pope Francis's view as he claims "that each creature has its own purpose in God's eternal design. The entire material universe speaks of God's



love”.<sup>1</sup> Augustine’s doctrine which recognizes the goodness of every creature and draws a clear picture of the interrelatedness of creation, highlights the fact that every decision we make can cause reverberations throughout an ecosystem.

Every created reality is part of God’s good creative work, and therefore is connected by a common origin and end in God. This theological interpretation of Augustine can certainly inspire us to reflect on our own place in the universe and reevaluate the impact of our own actions on the environment. If nature is indeed a ‘great book’ wide open for everybody to read, then we need to learn how to read it rightly. And for Augustine, the right reading of this book must lead us to know God because creation tells us of her creator, not by ink and paper, but by the grandeur of her beauty and the immensity of her design.

Thus, for Augustine creation is an open book that tells us about God. Creatures do not only have a practical purpose, but also, they have a semiotic or symbolic dimension, i.e., they can be, in a way “sacramental” in the Augustinian sense. All beings are signs that tell us about God. In the book of creation, God has not written with ink and words, but with concrete realities and living beings, which, signs as that they are, filled with beauty, can lead anyone who contemplates them to a reality beyond themselves—God, the creator of the universe.

However, for Augustine this “gaze” towards the world must not be colored by two worldviews which he deemed to be an upshot of secularization and the worldly or “Babylonian” city. First, for Augustin, one must avoid the gaze motivated by vain or useless curiosity. Curiosity can have a positive meaning for Augustine if it inspires one to satisfy the *appetitus ueritatis* (desire for truth); but this *appetitus* has its own vicious counterpart—the *uana curiositas*—which takes place when one fails to seek the wisdom or knowledge of the truth that leads to God, but instead he searches for the vain and superficial things:

We should not vainly behold the beauty of the sky, the order of the stars, the brightness of the light, the alternations of day and night, the monthly courses of the moon, the fourfold seasons of the year, the meeting of the four elements, the life-force of the seeds begetting forms and numbers, and all things that keep their nature and their appropriate measure each in its own kind. In considering

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<sup>1</sup>Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, 84.

these things there should be no exercise of vain and perishing curiosity, but a step should be taken towards immortal things that abide forever.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, to be able to read rightly the book of creation, it is necessary to avoid the second danger, i.e., “dispersion”. The person who breaks the right order of his own life and lives a life driven by various external elements, cannot look at the beauty of the world with sense of amazement and appreciation, and therefore cannot see in the beauty of creation the existence of God. This is exemplified by Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow, among others, who in their book “The Grand Design”<sup>3</sup>, have suggested that the beauty of this world does not lead us anywhere else, since it is nothing but part of a “Grand Design”, repeated infinitely in other universes. According to this “multiverse theory”, our universe is just one among endless number of universes, where everything repeats itself in the same manner as ours:

Our cosmic habitat—now the entire observable universe—is only one of many, just as our solar is one of many. That means that in the same way that the environmental coincidences of our solar system were rendered unremarkable by the realization that billions of such systems exist, the fine-tunings in the laws of nature can be explained by the existence of multiple universes.<sup>4</sup>

Following their tautology, the reason why the beauty of this world is insignificant is the fact that there are some laws of “fine-tuning”, which according to them can be explained by the existence of multiple universes, making the beauty of this world just one among the many, infinitely repeated in multiple universes, so that there is nothing new and extraordinary in its reality. Notwithstanding the “scientism” of these authors and their obvious atheistic orientation, it must be noted

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<sup>2</sup>Augustine, *uera rel.* 52, trans. John H. S. Burleigh, in the library of Christian Classics, Augustine: Earlier Writings (Philadelphia The Westminster Press, 1953), 251. PL 4, 145: “Non enim frustra et inaniter intueri oportet pulchritudinem caeli, ordinem siderum, candorem lucis, dierum et noctium vicissitudines, lunae menstrua curricula, anni quadrifariam temperationem, quadripartitis elementis congruentem, tantam vim seminum species numerosque gignentium, et omnia in suo genere modum proprium naturamque servantia. In quorum consideratione non vana et peritura curiositas exercenda est, sed gradus ad immortalia et semper manentia faciendus.”

<sup>3</sup>S. Hacking – L. Mlodinow, *The Grand Design*, New York, Bantam Books, 2010.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 165.

that the possible existence of multiple universes where the environmental conditions is identical to our own world—a theory which is more of a fiction than a scientific fact, since until today nobody has proven it scientifically, and it takes more faith to accept its claims than to believe in theological dogmas—should never be a reason to deny or disvalue the beauty of the world.

On the contrary, the possibility that there could be multiple universes with same ecological conditions with our planet, and that there could be creatures as beautiful as what exist on earth, must give humanity all the more reason to glorify and praise the Creator of such beauty. The choir of beauties of this earth would join the voices of those supposedly “billions of universes” so that in unison they would render greater praise and glory to the One, Creator of all.

On the other hand, Hawking and Mlodinow, explicitly deny the existence of a creator-God, asserting that everything came into existence through spontaneous generation (another theory rejected by “positivist science”). The existence of our universe and the supposed ‘multiple universes’ can be explained through spontaneous generation so that to postulate the presence of a God who creates is unnecessary:

“Spontaneous creation is the reason there is something rather than nothing, why the universe exists, why we exist. It is not necessary to invoke God to light the blue touch paper and set the universe going”<sup>5</sup>.

For all those who think like Hawking and Mlodinow, Augustine has beautiful reflection which stresses the necessity of integrity and unity within the soul itself, and to avoid external “dispersion” so that one is able to recognize the presence of God in the beauty of creation:

The human spirit, recollected within itself, grasps the beauty of the universe, which gets its name from *unum in diversis*, one in many. Therefore, that vision is denied to the soul distracted by too many pursuits, which avidly attains nothing but poverty.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 180.

<sup>6</sup>Augustine, *ord. 1, 2, 3*. trans. Silvano Borruso, *On Order* by St. Augustine (Indiana: St. Augustine’s Press South, 2007), 5. PL 32, 979: “Ita enim animus sibi redditus, quae sit pulchritudo universitatis intellegit; quae profecto ab uno cognominata est. Idcircoque illam videre non licet animae quae in multa procedit, sectaturque aviditate pauperiem, quam nescit sola segregazione multitudinis posse vitari.”

Conversely, in order to perceive the beauty of creation and to be able to see in that beauty a reflection of God's own beauty, it is necessary to receive a gift from the Holy Spirit, who helps human being open the eyes of the heart, and to perceive the sacramental dimension of everything that surrounds him. Particularly in a secularized world like ours, where nature has lost its symbolic dimension and is reduced to nothing more than a deposit of resources that can be exploited without limit, Augustine invites us to let ourselves be enlightened by the Spirit, to be able to perceive in the created world, the presence of God. The Bishop of Hippo states:

Infatuated are they who speak thus (that God did not create all things), since they see not Your works through Your Spirit, nor recognize You in them. But as for those who through Your Spirit see these things, You see in them. When therefore, they see that these things are good, You see that they are good; and whatsoever things for Your sake are pleasing, You are pleased in them; and those things which through Your Spirit are pleasing unto us, are pleasing unto You in us.<sup>7</sup>

For Augustine, it is possible to ascend through creation from what is visible to the invisible, from tangible realities to the ultimate cause of all things—the Trinitarian God Himself.<sup>8</sup> But in contemplating the world, love is necessary. It is imperative to see the world around us not with the eyes of consumerism, but with the eyes of love, as Augustine says in his sermon:

Love in order to see, because what you see is neither trash nor triviality. You will see then who made whatever else you love. And if these are lovely, what must he be like who made them? God

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<sup>7</sup>Augustine, *conf.* 13, 45-46, trans. J.G. Pilkington. From *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, vol. 1. ed. by Philip Schaff. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887). PL 32, 865: "Insani dicunt haec, quoniam non per spiritum tuum vident opera tua nec te cognoscunt in eis. Qui autem per spiritum tuum vident ea, tu vides in eis. Ergo cum vident, quia bona sunt, tu vides, quia bona sunt, et quaecumque propter te placent, tu in eis places, et quae per spiritum tuum placent nobis, tibi placent in nobis."

<sup>8</sup>Cf. Augustine, s. 126, 3. PL 38, 699: "Erige ergo rationalem aspectum, utere oculis ut homo, intende caelum et terram, ornamenta caeli, fecunditatem terrae, volatus avium, natatus piscium, vim seminum, ordinem temporum. Intende facta, et quaere factorem. Aspice quae vides, et quaere quod non vides".

doesn't want you loving the earth, he doesn't want you loving the sky, that is things you can see, but himself whom you can't see."<sup>9</sup>

Augustine teaches that the Angels in heaven esteem created realities in this manner. The Angels read and understands the book of creation from the perspective of love towards the Creator. They are not content with just seeing God's creation, they seek to see the Creator Himself: "The angels live enjoying not of the creatures, but of the Creator".<sup>10</sup> For this reason the book of creatures must be read imitating the manner by which the Angels contemplate the face of God, since they read, choose and love (*legunt, eligunt, diligunt*): "For they always behold Your face, and therein read without any syllables in time what Your eternal will wills. They read, they choose, they love. They are always reading; and that which they read never passes away".<sup>11</sup> In contemplating the book of creation and nature, it is necessary to see in it the presence and beauty of God in order to read, choose, and love God.

The encyclical *Laudato Si'* also speaks of the "Book of Nature." However, it made no reference to Augustine, instead in number 6 of the said document, the reader is referred to Pope emeritus Benedict XVI.<sup>12</sup> Later, in number 85 of the encyclical, the "Book of Creatures" is mentioned again, and this time, the reference is made to John Paul II, who used the term in his Catechesis but also made no mention of Augustine.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Augustine, s. 22A, 4. Trans. By Edmund Hill, OP. From the Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, Vol. 11, ed. by J.E. Rotelle, OSA (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1990), 53. PL 38, 151: "Ama, ut videas, quia non est vile quod videbis, non est leve. Illum videbis, qui fecit quidquid amas. Et si ista pulchra sunt, qualis est ipse qui fecit? Non vult Deus ames terram non vult Deus ames caelum, id est quae vides, sed ipsum quem non vides."

<sup>10</sup>Augustine, s. 4, 4. PL 38, 34: "Vivunt autem angeli in gaudio, non creaturae, sed Creatoris".

<sup>11</sup>Cf. Augustine, *conf.* 13, 18. Trans. J.G. Pilkington. From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 1. ed. by Philip Schaff. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887.). PL 32, 673: Vident enim faciem tuam semper, et ibi legunt sine syllabis temporum, quid velit aeterna voluntas tua. Legunt, eligunt et diligunt; semper legunt et numquam praeterit quod legunt.

<sup>12</sup>LS 6; Cf. Benedict XVI, Carta enc. *Caritas in veritate* (29 June 2009), 51: AAS 101 (2009), 687.

<sup>13</sup>John Paul II, Catechesis (30 June 2002), 6. Cf. J.A. Orr, "The Philosophical Magisterium of John Paul II Implicit in *Laudato Si'*", in M. Mills – J.A. Orr – H. Schnitker, Reflections on Pope's Francis' Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Cambridge, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017, 188-199.

## The Beauty of Creation

When confronted with the grandeur of the universe filled with immense beauty and harmony, any human being can be bewildered and amazed. Augustine reflects in his works that the “*coup de beauté*” of the world can arouse the admiration of every human being who has opened the eyes of his heart and has overcome the wall of secularization that “disenchants” nature. The modern trend of secularization turns man into a voracious consumer who cannot see in creation other than a heap of unlimited resources which satisfy his needs and has become indifferent to the fact that creation itself can reach exhaustion and death.

When this contemporary trend of consumerism seeps into the interior and man enters into a state which in Augustine's language is called “dispersion” and “vain curiosity”, man becomes ecstatic before nature, and its captivating beauty leads him to wonder if nature is itself a ‘God’. In a manner typical to Augustine, he gives a voice to this human restlessness in his writings, the restlessness of the eternal man,<sup>14</sup> of the man of all times, as he intellectually undertakes this question on the origin and destiny of beauty. Thus, Augustine asks the creatures if they are ‘God’. The creatures answer him that they are not God, but that it is necessary to rise above them in order to find God. They are a mere sign, a semiotic instrument that invites human being to go beyond, to transcend. Finally, the creatures in harmonic chorus respond to Augustine that the only thing they can tell him about the God he seeks is that God has created them. The Augustinian text is of great eloquence:

I asked the earth; and it answered, I am not He; and whatsoever are therein made the same confession. I asked the sea and the deeps, and the creeping things that lived, and they replied, We are not your God, seek higher than we. I asked the breezy air, and the universal air with its inhabitants answered, Anaximenes was deceived, I am not God. I asked the heavens, the sun, moon, and stars: Neither, say they, are we the God whom you seek? And I answered unto all these things which stand about the door of my flesh, You have told me

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<sup>14</sup>To paraphrase the celebrated book which bears the very same title by G. K. Chesterton, *The Eternal Man*, Madrid, Cristiandad, 2007.

concerning my God, that you are not He; tell me something about Him. And with a loud voice they exclaimed, He made us.<sup>15</sup>

Augustine expressed again this same thought some years later when he preached to the people, aware that some of his faithful could have asked the same question, and could have come to believe that nature itself was God or, from a materialistic perspective quite common in North Africa during his days, that the world was the tangible part of God, or a part of His own nature:

Let your mind roam the whole creation: from all sides creation will cry to you, “God made me”. Whatever delights you in art points you to the artist, and all the more so if you go around the whole created order: gazing on it fills you with longing to praise its maker. You see the heavens: they are the mighty works of God. You see the earth: God made the numbers of numerous seeds, the different species of plants, the great multitudes of animals.<sup>16</sup>

God is the author and creator of everything that exists, and the diversity of creatures and their beauty speak only of their Creator. When creation is questioned by man, its only reply is that it has been created by God. The beauty of the world can trigger in man an overwhelming experience that can only be translated into praise. Whoever contemplates the extraordinary beauty of creation with the eyes of the heart cannot remain silent and needs to express his admiration through praise to the Creator. For Augustine, the world and the entire creation is a form of

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<sup>15</sup>Augustine, *conf. 10, 9*. Trans. by J.G. Pilkington. From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 1. Edited by Philip Schaff. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887). PL 32, 783: “Interrogavi terram, et dixit: “Non sum”; et quaecumque in eadem sunt, idem confessa sunt. Interrogavi mare et abyssos et reptilia animarum vivarum, et responderunt: “Non sumus Deus tuus; quaere super nos”. Interrogavi auras flabiles, et inquit universus aer cum incolis suis: “Fallitur Anaximenes; non sum Deus”. Interrogavi caelum, solem, lunam, stellas: “Neque nos sumus Deus, quem quaeris”, inquirunt. Et dixi omnibus his, quae circumstant fores carnis meae: “Dicite mihi de Deo meo, quod vos non estis, dicite mihi de illo aliquid”. Et exclamaverunt voce magna: Ipse fecit nos.”

<sup>16</sup>Augustine, *en. Ps. 26, 2, 12*. Trans. by Maria Boulding, OSB. From the Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Part III, Vol. 15. Edited by J. E. Rotelle, OSA (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2000), 282. PL 36, 205: “Circumeat animus tuus per universam creaturam: undique tibi clamabit creatura: Deus me fecit. Quidquid te delectarit in arte, artificem commendat; magisque si circumeas universa, consideratio concipit artificis laudem. Vides coelos, magna opera Dei sunt. Vides terram, Deus fecit seminum numeros, diversitates germinum, multitudinem animalium.”

sacrament, a tangible sign of the beauty of God so that when the human heart is open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, it becomes disposed to *confessio laudis*, leading him to recognize and praise the greatness of God, as well as the perfection and goodness of all that He has created:

How powerful is God, who made the earth! How powerful is God, who filled it with good things, who gave their several lives to all its living creatures, who sowed various seeds in the womb of the earth that it might bear so many different shrubs and such beautiful trees! How powerful is God, and how great! It is your calling, you saint of God, to question, and creation's part to respond to you. Its response is creation's song of confession, and as you hear it, you bless God and tell of his power.<sup>17</sup>

In the *Confessions*, Augustine praises God for the work of redemption which He himself has accomplished with His own life; but also, he praises God for the wonders of creation which manifests His eternal beauty and draws man to ascend to the Creator:

You heavens of heavens, praise him, and let the waters that are above the heavens praise the name of the Lord. How can the psalmist hope to unfurl them all? By enumerating them? No, that is impossible, but he summarizes and binds them all together into a tight bundle which contains all the heavenly beings that praise their creator.<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand, in his controversy with Julian of Eclana who accused him of maintaining some Manichean ideas, Augustine tells Julian that frequently he praises God for the goodness of creation,

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<sup>17</sup>Augustine, *en. Ps.* 144, 14. Trans. by Maria Boulding, OSB. From the Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, Part III, Vol. 20. Edited by B. Ramsey (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2004), 392. PL 36, 1879: "Quam potens Deus, qui fecit terram! quam potens Deus, qui implevit terram bonis! quam potens Deus, qui dedit vitas suas proprias animalibus! quam potens Deus, qui semina diversa dedit visceribus terrae, ut germinarent tantam varietatem fruticum, tantam speciem arborum! quam potens Deus, quam magnus Deus! Tu interroga, creatura respondet; et de responsione, tamquam confessione creaturae, tu, sancte Dei, benedicis Deum, et potentiam loqueris."

<sup>18</sup>Augustine, *en. Ps.* 148, 6. Trans. by Maria Boulding, OSB. From the Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, Part III, Vol. 15. Edited by J. E. Rotelle, OSA (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2000), 480-81. PL 36, 1941: "Laudate eum coeli coelorum, et aquae quae super coelos sunt, laudent nomen Domini. Quando explicat omnia numerando? Sed tamen summatim et quasi omnia perstrinxit, et conclusit omnia coelestia laudantia Creatorem suum."



continually elevating his *confessio laudis* to God through creation, and not like the Manicheans, who considered the world as fruit of the god of darkness, or like the Platonists who despised the material world as nothing more than a shadow of the supra-celestial world which is the perfect world. Thus, Augustine says to Julian: “the praise of creatures is frequently on my lips”.<sup>19</sup> This phrase has become also an invitation to praise God for the beauty of His creation and through the way of contemplation, be able to encounter Him, the Supreme Beauty.

For the Bishop of Hippo, praise on the lips is giving back to God what He himself has given to man. For this reason, when Augustine makes a commentary on the text of Mt 22, 15-22 (where the Pharisees want to trap Jesus by asking whether it is right to pay tax to Caesar or not, and Christ asks for a coin, and points out that it is necessary give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s), he points out again that it is necessary to give God the praise He deserves. If God has given man the ability to perceive His presence in creation through the Holy Spirit, man ought to give praise to God when he perceives the beauty of everything He created. Caesar must be given his due, but praise and glory is for God and the believer must offer himself completely to God:

As human beings render to Caesar what belongs to Caesar when they hand back the coin that bears his image, so do they render to God what belongs to God when they give themselves back to him whose image they bear and lift the minds above themselves to their designer, to the light from which they came and (...) as they trustingly raise the eyes of their hearts. Mentally they contemplate the entire world that lies around them: earth, sea, and sky; they see how beautifully all things are disposed, how they pursue their ordered courses, distinguished by their species, preserved by their generative powers, changing, evolving, and surviving through swiftly-running time. When wise people observe creation, they delight in its creator (...) then they exclaim for sheer joy, “How magnificent are your works, O Lord! In wisdom you have created all things”.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Cf. Augustine, *c. Iul. imp.* 4, 121. PL 45, 1416: “Laudationem creaturarum frequentamus et nos”.

<sup>20</sup>Augustine, *en. Ps.* 103, 4, 2. Trans. by Maria Boulding, OSB. From the Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, Part III, Vol. 19. Edited by B.

The beauty of the created beings is their praise that they raise to God; it has become their own unspoken confession:

Question the beauty of the earth, question the beauty of the sea, question the beauty of the air, amply spread around everywhere, question the beauty of the sky, question the serried ranks of the stars, question the sun making the day glorious with its bright beams, question the moon (...), question all these things. They all answer you, "Here we are, look; we're beautiful."<sup>21</sup>

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Ramsey (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2003), 168. PL 36, 1379: "Homines ergo reddentes Deo quae Dei sunt, si Caesari reddunt quod Caesaris est; id est, reddentes Caesari imaginem suam, et reddentes Deo imaginem suam, erigunt ipsam mentem suam, non ad se, sed ad artificem suum, et ad lumen unde sunt, et ad calorem quemdam spiritalem unde fervescent, et unde remoti frigescunt, et unde recedentes contenebrantur, et quo revertentes illuminantur: et quia pie illi dixerunt: Tu illuminabis lucernam meam, Domine; Deus meus, illuminabis tenebras meas; discussis tenebris terrenae stultitiae, aperientes os et ducentes spiritum, erigunt, ut dixi, fidentem oculum cordis; et circumspiciunt mente universum mundum, terram, mare et coelum, et videntes omnia pulchre disposita, ordinata currere, digeri generibus, fulciri seminibus, mutari successionibus, currere temporibus placet eis in his artifex, ut et ipsi placeant in artificio artificii; et exclamant prae magno gaudio, quia vere huic laetitiae nihil comparari potest: Quam magnificata sunt opera tua, Domine! Omnia in sapientia fecisti. Ubi est ipsa sapientia in qua omnia fecisti? quo sensu attingitur? quo oculo videtur? quo studio quaeritur? quo merito possidetur? Quo putatis, nisi gratia sua? Qui donavit ut simus, donat ut boni simus. Donat conversis, qui antequam converterentur, et cum aversi irent post vias suas, nonne quaesivit eos? nonne descendit? nonne Verbum caro factum est, et habitavit in nobis? nonne accendit lucernam carnis suae, dum penderet in cruce, et quaesivit perditam drachmam? Quaesivit et invenit, vicinis congratulantibus, id est omni creatura spiritali quae Deum proxime attingit. Vicinis laetantibus inventa est drachma; Angelis laetantibus inventa est anima humana. Inventa est, ergo gaudeat, et dicat: Quam magnificata sunt opera tua, Domine! Omnia in sapientia fecisti."

<sup>21</sup>Augustine, *s.* 241, 2. Trans. by Edmund Hill, OP. From the Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, Part III, Vol. 7. Edited by J. E. Rotelle, OSA (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1993), 71. PL 38, 1134: "Interroga pulchritudinem terrae, interroga pulchritudinem maris, interroga pulchritudinem dilatati et diffusi aeris, interroga pulchritudinem coeli, interroga ordinem siderum, interroga solem fulgore suo diem clarificantem, interroga lunam splendore subsequentis noctis tenebras temperantem, interroga animalia quae moventur in aquis, quae morantur in terris, quae volitant in aere; latentes animas, perspicua corpora; visibilia regenda, invisibiles regentes: interroga ista, Respondent tibi omnia: Ecce vide, pulchra sumus. Pulchritudo eorum, confessio eorum."

Tertullian, possibly with a touch of *prosopopoeia*, recalled that animated beings praise God and pray. Thus, he says in *De Oratione*<sup>22</sup> that when creatures soar through the heavens with their wings spread out, they imitate the cross of the Lord, and the four-legged beasts when they come out of their pens and fold their legs as though kneeling on the ground, they pay homage and praise to God.

## Modern Pantheism

Augustine's theology on nature absolutely excludes pantheism and all its stealthy forms. For the Bishop of Hippo, the beauty which creation is adorned with does not make it a 'god', nor does it make it part of the substance of God—a worldview espoused by pantheism and many other neo-pagan environmental movements. According to the Augustinian teaching, when this happens, an essential element is ignored—the double purpose conferred on creation by Word of God. First, according to Augustine, creation with all its grandeur is meant to bring us to God, the source of all good things, and secondly, it is created by God to satisfy the needs of men and women, and of all other living things.<sup>23</sup> Man for his part is so ordained to protect creation and serve as its steward so that he has the responsibility to look after the world and administer it in the name of God (Gen 2:15).

In recent times, many neopagan environmental movements tend to exalt living creatures and creation itself, not only by putting them at same level with men, but even at times, by placing them above humanity itself, thus creating further alteration of the fundamental order of creation where the irrational must submit to and be governed by the rational being.<sup>24</sup> For Augustine, creation is governed by natural order and is never part of the substance of God, much less, God Himself:

God Almighty has made good things. But the things made by Him cannot be such as is He who made them. For it is unjust and foolish to believe that works are equal to the workman, things made to the maker.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Cf. Tertuliano, *De Oratione*, 29. CSEL 20, 200: 5-10.

<sup>23</sup>Cf. Augustine, *c. Faust.* 20, 20.

<sup>24</sup>Cf. Augustine, *trin.* 7, 12.

<sup>25</sup>Augustine, *c. Fort.* 21. trans. by Albert H. Newman. From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 4. Edited by Philip Schaff. (Buffalo, NY: Christian

The bishop of Hippo makes it very clear that God, in the process of creation, “did not engender them (creatures) out of His own nature so that they would be as what He is, but created them out of nothing so that, as is reasonable, they would not be the same as either the One who made them, or the Son through whom they were created”.<sup>26</sup>

On the other hand, it is wrong to devalue human dignity and place it below other form of living creatures in the universe. The Bishop of Hippo brings this doctrine to light by giving an extremely illustrative example. In view of the fact that there were slaves in his own days, Augustine defended the dignity of the slaves, and pleaded for the humane treatment they deserved.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, despite the fact that slaves had a commercial economic value, i.e., they had monetary price, as was customary at his time, and that this price could even be lower than the price of a horse or any other animal, Augustine drew attention to the fact that human dignity is over and above these economic and chrematistic elements, and reminded the slave masters of their duty to care for their slaves, to form them to be good Christians, and to love them in God as neighbors, more valuable than garments and other elements:

For a Christian ought not to possess a slave in the same way as a horse or money: although it may happen that a horse is valued at a greater price than a slave, and some article of gold or silver at much more. But with respect to that slave, if he is being educated and ruled by time as his master, in a way more upright, and more honourable, and more conducing to the fear of God, than can be done by him who desires to take him away, I do not know whether any one would dare to say that he ought to be despised like a garment. For a man ought to love a fellow-man as himself, inasmuch as he is

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Literature Publishing Co., 1887. PL 42, 122-123: Omnipotentem Deum, iustum et bonum, fecisse bona. Sed ea quae ab illo facta sunt, non possunt esse talia, qualis est ipse qui fecit.

<sup>26</sup>Augustine, *Gen. adu. Man.* 2, 4. PL 34, 172: “...sed non sic bona sunt, quomodo bonus est Deus, quia ille fecit, haec autem facta sunt: nec ea genuit de seipso, ut hoc essent quod ipse est; sed ea fecit de nihilo, ut non essent aequalia, nec ei a quo facta sunt; nec Filio eius per quem facta sunt”.

<sup>27</sup>Cf. G. Corcoran, *Saint Augustin on Slavery*, Roma, Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 1985; Cf. A. Conley, «Augustine and Slavery. Freedom for the Free», in T. Delgado - J. Doody - K. Paffenroth, *Augustine and Social Justice*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2015, 131-144.

commanded by the Lord of all (as is shown by what follows) even to love his enemies.<sup>28</sup>

Hence, the value and dignity of the human person cannot be equated with the animals and other living beings, as some modern environmentalists tend to conceive and even accuse those who do not think like them as “anthropocentric” and “primacist”.<sup>29</sup>

In the face of this pantheistic worldview, which in some occasions can even be hidden in a Christian or biblically inspired thought, taking the form of a crypto-pantheistic environmentalism, Augustine’s doctrine on creation can shed light on how we should look at creation and discover its proper place in the natural order of things. According to the Bishop of Hippo, the goodness and beauty of creation are primarily signs which reminds us of the Creator. And being signs of something beyond themselves, their splendid beauty and harmony should lead us towards the beauty of God Himself. For this reason, Augustine invites us to strip environmentalism of its pagan elements to be able to transcend towards the Creator. There is no ‘goddess nature’, nor a ‘god Pan’, who is nothing but ‘pure panic’, as Chesterton reminds us.<sup>30</sup> There is only an omnipotent God who, moved by pure love and mercy, has created

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<sup>28</sup>Augustine, *s. dom. m.* 1, 59. trans. by William Findlay. From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 6. Edited by Philip Schaff. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1888.). PL 34, 1260: “Non enim christianum oportet sic possidere servum quomodo equum aut argentum, quamquam fieri possit ut maiore pretio valeat equus quam servus, et multo magis aliquid aureum vel argenteum. Sed ille servus, si rectius et honestius et ad Deum colendum accomodatius abs te domino educatur aut regitur, quam ab illo potest qui eum cupit auferre, nescio utrum quisquam dicere audeat ut vestimentum eum debere contemni. Hominem namque homo tamquam se ipsum diligere debet, cui ab omnium Domino, sicut ea quae sequuntur ostendunt, etiam ut inimicos diligat imperatur.”

<sup>29</sup>Cf. Joseph Kelley “Anthropocene as Empire. An Augustinian Anthropology for ‘Keeping Wild’”, en J. Doody – K. Paffenroth – M. Smillie (ed.), *Augustine and Environment*, Lanham-Boulder-New York-London, Lexington Books, 20116, 55 ; Cf. Eileen Crist, “On the Poverty of Our Nomenclature”, in *Environmental Humanities Journal* 3 (2013), 130.

<sup>30</sup>G. K. Chesterton, *St. Francis of Assisi*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 2013, p. 20: “Whatever natural religion may have had to do with their beginnings, nothing but fiends now inhabited those hollow shrines. Pan was nothing but panic. Venus was nothing but venereal vice. I do not mean for a moment, of course, that all the individual pagans were of this character even to the end; but it was as individuals that they differed from it”.

everything from nothing;<sup>31</sup> after all, the world is contingent and need not to exist.<sup>32</sup> For this reason, creation is a living and patent sign that must lead man to meet his own maker, as Augustine says: “contemplate the beauty of the world and praise the Creator’s design: see what He did and love the One who did it. But remember mainly this: love the One who made it; because you, who love Him, are also made in His image”.<sup>33</sup>

According to Augustine, it is a shame if one loves the world but fails to love the Creator of the world, or if one loves the goodness and beauty of creation, but has not loved the highest Good, i.e., God Himself, who made all creatures to be beautiful and good:

But whereas other things are not loved, except because they are good, be ashamed, in cleaving to them, not to love the good itself whence they are good. That also, which is a mind, only because it is a mind, while it is not yet also good by the turning itself to the unchangeable good, but, as I said, is only a mind; whenever it so pleases us, as that we prefer it even, if we understand aright, to all corporeal light, does not please us in itself, but in that skill by which it was made.<sup>34</sup>

Augustine invites us to love the Creator in the creature, knowing that creature reflects the beauty of God, but while its splendor is contingent and temporary, God’s beauty is eternal and remains forever:

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<sup>31</sup>Cf. Augustine, *Gn. adu. Man.* 1, 2, 4: Also *Gn. adu. Man.* 1, 6, 10: “Et ideo Deus rectissime creditur omnia de nihilo fecisse, quia etiamsi omnia formata de ista materia facta sunt, haec ipsa materia tamen de omnino nihilo facta est.”

<sup>32</sup>Augustine, *ciu.* 11, 4. PL 41, 319: “Sed quid placuit aeterno Deo tunc facere caelum et terram, quae antea non fecisset? Qui hoc dicunt, si mundum aeternum sine ullo initio, et ideo nec a Deo factum videri volunt, nimis aversi sunt a veritate et letali morbo impietatis insaniunt.

<sup>33</sup>Augustine, *s.* 68, 5. PL 38, 439: “Vide pulchritudinem mundi, et lauda consilium Creatoris: vide quod fecit, ama qui fecit. Tene hoc maxime, ama qui fecit; quia et te ipsum amatorem suum ad imaginem suam fecit”.

<sup>34</sup>Augustine, *trin.* 8, 3, 5. trans. by Arthur West Haddan. From *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, Vol. 3. Edited by Philip Schaff. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887). PL 42, 950: “Pudeat autem cum alia non amentur nisi quia bona sunt, eis inhaerendo non amare Bonum ipsum unde bona sunt. Illud etiam, quod animus, tantum quia est animus, etiam nondum eo modo bonus quo se convertit ad incommutabile Bonum; sed, ut dixi, tantum animus, cum ita nobis placet ut eum omni etiam luci corporeae cum bene intellegimus, praeferamus, non in se ipso nobis placet sed in illa arte qua factus est”.

Let our God be our hope. He who made all things, is better than all! He who made what is beautiful, is more beautiful than all that is such. He who made whatever is mighty, is Himself mightier. He who made whatever is great, is Himself greater. He will be unto you everything that you love. Learn in the creature to love the Creator; and in the work Him who made it. Let not that which has been made by Him detain your affections, so that you should lose Him by whom you yourself were made also.<sup>35</sup>

For Augustine, the book of creation has a mediating value as it speaks of the beauty and splendor of God. But even if it can be lavishly beautiful, still the One who made it is far more beautiful. He says: “Now all things are fair that You have made, but behold, You are inexpressibly fairer who hast made all things”.<sup>36</sup>

Hence, in the mind of Augustine, the contemplative approach on nature must not end and culminate in nature itself, as is the flaw of pantheism and neo-pagan environmental movements which would often end up deifying nature. Contemplation on creation must lead the mind to God; creation serves as medium to discover the eternal beauty of God Himself. For this reason, one of the keys to the Augustinian thought is transcendence—going beyond creatures and ascending towards God.

## The Order and Design in the Universe

For Augustine, the idea of order is essential, and it occupies a central place when it deals with creation and ecology. God created all things with order according to His eternal design, established natural law, and governs His house which is the entire universe with love and care much more than any human could do in his own household. Hence,

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<sup>35</sup>Augustine, *en. Ps.* 39, 8. trans. by J.E. Tweed. From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 8. Edited by Philip Schaff. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1888). PL 36, 439: “Sit spes nostra Deus noster. Qui fecit omnia, melior est omnibus; qui pulchra fecit, pulchrior est omnibus; qui fortia, fortior est; qui magna, maior est: quidquid amaveris, ille tibi erit. Disce amare in creatura creatorem, et in factura factorem; ne teneat te quod ab illo factum est, et amittas eum a quo et ipse factus es”.

<sup>36</sup>Augustine, *conf.* 13, 28. trans. by J.G. Pilkington. From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 1. Edited by Philip Schaff. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887). PL 32, 856: “Et pulchra sunt omnia faciente te, et ecce tu inenarrabiliter pulchrior, qui fecisti omnia”.

for Augustine, order in nature must be another way to reach God, since in the universe everything, from the smallest to the greatest of creatures, is endowed with order and innate design:

God has ordered everything, and made everything: to some He has given sense and understanding and immortality, as to the angels; to some He has given sense and understanding with mortality, as to man; to some He has given bodily sense, yet gave them not understanding, or immortality, as to cattle: to some He has given neither sense, nor understanding, nor immortality, as to herbs, trees, stones: yet even these cannot be wanting in their kind, and by certain degrees He has ordered His creation, from earth up to heaven, from visible to invisible, from mortal to immortal.<sup>37</sup>

And this order is at the same time preserved by the Trinitarian God who determined everything and established His law from the simplest part of a tiny worm, to the most complex creatures of the same universe.<sup>38</sup> Despite this, still there are people who, driven by some sort of ‘scientism’, have trivialized the beauty of nature and even go as far as to argue that human being is just as admirable as a worm made up only of 959 cells, since according to this worldview, all beings came into existence by a process called ‘spontaneous generation’. As already mentioned, among these group are Hawking and Mlodinow who affirmed in their writings that human being does not deserve greater admiration than a *Caenorhabditis elegans* since everything was made through spontaneous or accidental production.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, apart from the opinions of these scientists—about whom Augustine already warned, that they can be knowledgeable but are not wise,<sup>40</sup>—all creatures are created with a definite reason or purpose in

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<sup>37</sup>Augustine, *en. Ps.* 144, 13. Trans. by J.E. Tweed. From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 8. Edited by Philip Schaff. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1888). PL 36, 1878: “Deus ordinavit omnia, et fecit omnia: quibusdam dedit sensum, et intellectum, et immortalitatem, sicut Angelis; quibusdam dedit sensum et intellectum cum mortalitate, sicut hominibus; quibusdam dedit sensum corporis, nec intellectum, nec immortalitatem dedit, sicut pecoribus; quibusdam vero nec sensum, nec intellectum, nec immortalitatem, sicut herbis, lignis, lapidibus: tamen et ipsa in genere suo deesse non possunt, et gradibus quibusdam ordinavit creaturam, a terra usque ad coelum, a visibilibus ad invisibilia, a mortalibus ad immortalia”.

<sup>38</sup>Cf. Augustine, *en. Ps.* 125, 5.

<sup>39</sup>Cf. S. Hawking – L. Mlodinow, *The Great Design*, New York, Bantam Books, 2010, 31.

<sup>40</sup>Cf. Augustine, *doctr. chr.* 2, 38, 57.



the mysterious plan of God; from the most useful, to those which are indifferent to human, and including even those which are deemed to be harmful. Man may not be fully aware of the existence of the design, but God has arranged everything with order and harmony according to His eternal wisdom.

Moreover, this order in creation never ceases to inspire and impress humans as creatures follow a series of systems and laws thus creating an orchestrated harmony in the entire universe. However, man can get so accustomed to this natural wonder around him that this beautiful reality in nature may go on its daily course almost unnoticed. But for Augustine the miracle that the vines and branches continue to produce fruit until today, is just as amazing as the miracle at Cana in Galilee when Jesus transformed water into wine (Jn 2, 1-11). With deep theological importance, the Cana miracle happened once; but the miracle which happens every day, in which the seeds and grains grow and continue to bear fruit, is just as admirable according to the Augustinian perspective:

For who is there that considers the works of God, whereby this whole world is governed and regulated, who is not amazed and overwhelmed with miracles? If he considers the vigorous power of a single grain of any seed whatever, it is a mighty thing, it inspires him with awe. But since men, intent on a different matter, have lost the consideration of the works of God, by which they should daily praise Him as the Creator, God has, as it were, reserved to Himself the doing of certain extraordinary actions, that, by striking them with wonder, He might rouse men as from sleep to worship Him.<sup>41</sup>

And in this order established by the divine wisdom, the less perfect must obey the more perfect, so that in human nature, the body must submit to the soul, and the soul for its part must submit to God in order to achieve its full happiness.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 8, 1. Translated by John Gibb. From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 7. Edited by Philip Schaff. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1888.). PL 35, 1450: “Quis est enim qui considerat opera Dei, quibus regitur et administratur totus hic mundus, et non obstupescit obruiturque miraculis? Si consideret vim unius grani, cuiuslibet seminis, magna quaedam res est, horror est consideranti. Sed quia homines in aliud intenti perdiderunt considerationem operum Dei, in qua darent laudem quotidie Creatori; tamquam servavit sibi Deus inusitata quaedam quae faceret, ut tamquam dormientes homines, ad se colendum mirabilis excitaret”.

<sup>42</sup>Cf. Augustine, *s.* 128, 5.

On the other hand, in creation, as in a living body, the irrational creatures must submit to the rational, so that God's eternal design can be fulfilled, and all creatures can participate in God's rest where the whole of creation can achieve its purpose and full perfection.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, in Augustine's symbolic analogy, the fact that many beasts of the field have their heads bent down towards the earth, while man's head is inclined towards heaven, seem to indicate that human beings should not fix his gaze on earthly things, but rather must aspire for the goods of the kingdom of heaven, as he leads and governs creation in the name of God towards its final destiny.<sup>44</sup> Within the bounds of this order established by the Creator, some creatures serve as food for the other, in an orderly manner. Wild beasts feed on each other. In the same manner, human being can satisfy his needs from the resources which creation offers him, but always with prudence and moderation, and always with the awareness that he is simply an administrator of the earth and not its owner.<sup>45</sup>

One more aspect which needs to be underscored in relation to the *ordo* established by God in nature, is that human being has the sublime responsibility to be the custodian and administrator of the goods of creation. But God is the sole owner, as Augustine points out:

Mine are those which you possess not, Mine are these which you possess. For if you are My servant, the whole of your property is Mine. For it cannot be, that is the property of the master which the servant has gotten to himself, and yet that not be the property of the Master which the Master Himself has created for the servant. Therefore Mine are the beasts of the wood which you have not taken; Mine are also the cattle on the mountains which are yours, and the oxen which are at your stall: all are My own, for I have created them.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Cf. Augustine, *conf.* 13, 47.

<sup>44</sup>Cf. Augustine, *ciu.* 22, 24, 4.

<sup>45</sup>Cf. Augustine, *c. Faust.* 20, 20. Also Cf. *Gn. adu. Man.* 1, 20, 31.

<sup>46</sup>Augustine, *en. Ps.* 49, 17. Trans. by J.E. Tweed. From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 8. Edited by Philip Schaff. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1888). PL 36, 579: "Mea sunt illa quae non possides, mea sunt ista quae possides. Si enim servus meus es tu, totum peculium tuum meum est. Neque enim est peculium Domini quod sibi servus comparavit, et non erit peculium Domini quod ipse Dominus servo creavit. Ergo meae sunt bestiae silvae quas tu non cepisti; mea sunt et pecora in montibus quae sunt tua, et boves qui sunt ad praesepe tuum: omnia mea sunt, quia ego creavi ea".

In Augustine's perspective, man himself is part of God's creation. But being created in the image of God, he is called to govern the world and may even use its resources to satisfy his needs. However, this does not grant him the authority to harm or destroy creation, for it is God's house,<sup>47</sup> of which he is just an administrator. To drive a point, Augustine uses an image quite typical of his own time, that of the *Villicum*, an administrator of a farm. He is not the owner, but simply the one who governs and manages the property in behalf of the owner. His responsibility is to see to it that order is preserved; the workers carry out their work and the farm is cultivated properly so it may produce copious fruits. But it is not within his authority to exploit and destroy the farm to satisfy his greed, for the simple fact that the does not own the land.

The same is true with man in relation to creation. From an Augustinian point of view, true ecology implies a fundamental awareness on the part of man that he does not have absolute ownership of anything in this world. Not only in the spiritual level—for humility is the foundation of virtues according to Augustine—but also in the global or planetary level. In the common home, we are all administrators who are called to manage rightly what has been placed into our hands. But we are not its owners; we are servants who are called to carry out good management, so that we can leave the farm, that is to say, the earth, in good condition for future generations, and most of all, that we may be able to render and the end an account to the true owner of the farm who is God Himself. In a very concise but profound way, Augustine articulates this thought:

After all, we are all stewards, and we have to do something with whatever has been entrusted to us in this life, so that we can account for it to the great householder. And from the one to whom more has been entrusted, a stricter account will be required (...) whether they are rich, or kings, or princes, or judges, whether they are bishops, or those in charge of churches.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>Cf. Augustine, *Gn. adu. Man.* 1, 16, 26.

<sup>48</sup>Augustine, s. 359A, 11. Trans. By Edmund Hill, OP. From the Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, Part III, Vol. 10. Edited by J. E. Rotelle, OSA (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1993), 217. PL 38, 1597: "Omnes enim villici sumus et aliquid nobis in hac vita commissum est agendum unde magno patrifamilias rationem reddamus. Et cui plus commissum est, maior ratio ab illo exigitur. Prima lectio quae recitata est, terruit omnes et maxime eos terruit qui praesunt populis, sive divites sint, sive reges sint, sive principes sint, sive iudices sint, sive episcopi sint, sive praepositi ecclesiarum. Unusquisque de actu suo patri familiae redditurus est rationem".

## The Social Dimension of Goods

The human person, in addition to having been endowed with reason and understanding,<sup>49</sup> is the only creature made in the image and likeness of God,<sup>50</sup> so that he must govern and administer creation in the name of God. But in the government and administration of goods, he must never forget that the things of the earth were created for all men, not just for a selected few. For Augustine, the social dimension of the goods of the earth is not inconsequential, but fundamental. Nature, which is lavish and generous, must be protected and cared for so that it continues to be a sign and living message of God for the poor and needy, not because nature lacks resources, but because of the excessive accumulation of goods in the hands of a few who, motivated by greed, have robbed the poor, neglected the social dimension of goods, and monopolized its possession. Thus, says Augustine:

Take stock then: not only can you manage on a few things only, but God himself asks very few from you. Ask yourself how much he has given you and then pick out what you need: all the rest of your things lie there as superfluities, but for other people they are necessities. The superfluity of the rich is necessary to the poor. If you hold onto the superfluous items, then, you are keeping what belongs to someone else.<sup>51</sup>

Creation is rich and bountiful, but it pertains to human being as administrator to make sure that the goods of this earth which belong to God, be beneficial to all men and avoiding every form of greed, avarice or the desire for profit, which hinder the just distribution of riches. The *ordo* of creation is violated when human being, by allowing himself to be seduced by selfishness and pride, seeks his own happiness not in God but in himself and in his self-vested interest, altering the natural order of the universe, the ecological order, the *ordo amoris*, and the order of relation with God and with fellow human beings.

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<sup>49</sup>Cf. Augustine, *conf.* 13, 22; *trin.* 7, 12.

<sup>50</sup>Cf. Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 3, 20, 30.

<sup>51</sup>Augustine, *en. Ps.* 147, 12. Trans. by Maria Boulding, OSB. From the Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, Part III, Vol. 15. Edited by J. E. Rotelle, OSA (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2000), 454. PL. 36, 1922. "Videte quia non solum pauca sunt quae vobis sufficient; sed nec ipse Deus multa a vobis quaerit. Quaere quantum tibi dederit, et ex eo tollo quod sufficit: caetera quae superflua iacent, aliorum sunt necessaria. Superflua divitum, necessaria sunt pauperum. Res alienae possidentur, cum superflua possidentur".

While it is true that in the time of Augustine the ecological situation was not as serious as we experience it today, the exploitation of the poor by rich landowners who would cultivate the land even unto exhaustion, was not unusual in that period. For this reason, the Bishop of Hippo would continually intercede in behalf of the poor and ask that the oppressive situation be avoided, and that the goods of the earth be distributed fairly. Certainly, in Augustine's time, just as in ours, greed and excessive desire for money were the principal obstacles to justice.

In the Augustinian correspondence, we find a particular case which illustrates the oppression by a powerful landowner of a simple and poor peasant, named Faventius, who was forced to escape from the farm where he was compelled to work like a slave, and how Augustine intervened to avail for him the right of asylum, in an extraordinary attempt to help him. The ending of the story could not be more tragic. One night when Faventius had gone out for dinner with a friend, he was apprehended by an officer who worked for the governor of the province of Africa. He was taken far from Hippo where no one could trace him, and there they punished him for having fled from the farm and denounced the landowner. Despite Augustine's effort to make an official complaint of the abuses committed against the poor in violation of legal statutes, even sending Florencio himself the text of the law which detailed the right to asylum,<sup>52</sup> at the end, everything fell on deaf ears. Faventius disappeared and nothing was heard of him again.<sup>53</sup> This was the context of Augustine's letter in *epistle* 115:

For although the integrity of that judge is widely famed as incorruptible, Faventius has for his adversary a man of very great wealth. To secure that money may not prevail in that court, I beg your Holiness, my beloved lord and venerable brother, to have the kindness to give the accompanying letter to the honorable magistrate, a man very much beloved by us, and to read this letter also to him; for I have not thought it necessary to write twice the same statement of the case. I trust that he will delay the hearing of the case, because I do not know whether the man is innocent or guilty.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>Cf. Augustine, *ep.* 115, the letter was addressed to Fortunato bishop of Cirta.

<sup>53</sup>Cf. Augustine, *ep.* 113-116. Cf. S. Lancel, *Saint Augustin*, Paris, Fayard, 1999, 377.

<sup>54</sup>Augustine, *ep.* 115. Trans. by J.G. Cunningham. From *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 1. Edited by Philip Schaff. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887). PL 33, 430. "Habet enim causam cum homine pecuniosissimo,

## Image of God and Human Dominion

Some critics of Augustine have accused him of having portrayed an image of God who created the universe by arbitrary will.<sup>55</sup> But by looking directly into his writings, we also see that such accusation does not really measure up to Augustine's true doctrine. For Augustine, "God is all-powerful not by arbitrary power but by the strength of wisdom".<sup>56</sup> Thus God's action which brings creation to existence proceeds purely from His wisdom and divine goodness. In response to the act of God, animate and inanimate things shape themselves as a balance whole, seeking all the time what science calls dynamic equilibrium.

But all this is simply the result of the divine wisdom and goodness that is not conditioned by any need or necessity. Roman Williams points out that in Augustine's theological scheme, creation is viewed as a product of God's pure desire for the good of another; that from God's 'point of view', creation is 'good for nothing' as it doesn't serve a divine need.<sup>57</sup> God creates from the bounty of His goodness and in His divine wisdom governs creation with love that "seeks nothing for itself but the joy of the other".<sup>58</sup> This is the image of God that Augustine portrays in his doctrine of Trinity and creation.

Now for Augustine, the work of human dominion over nature is what makes humanity distinct from among other created beings. Basing his reflection on Genesis 1:26, Augustine argues that God has granted to humanity the dominion over creatures. He understands dominion as the rule by human beings of nonhuman creatures through the exercise of reason. The danger of the concept of dominion from an ecological perspective is identifying dominion with the *domination of human reason* over the world, the license to exercise arbitrary will without restraint. History has stigmatized humanity of abusive kings

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quamvis iudicis integritas fama clarissima praedicetur. Ne quid tamen apud Officium pecunia praevaleat, peto Sanctitatem tuam, domine dilectissime et venerabilis frater, ut honorabili nobisque carissimo Consulari digneris tradere litteras meas, et has ei legere; quia bis eandem causam insinuare necessarium non esse arbitratus sum; et eius causae differat audientiam, quoniam nescio utrum in ea nocens an innocens sit".

<sup>55</sup>See Colin Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, 75-76.

<sup>56</sup>Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 9, 17, 32.

<sup>57</sup>Cf. Rowan Williams, *On Augustine*, 72-73

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 75.

or political leaders who ruled by arbitrary will, politically motivated ideologies charged with greed and self-vested interest, and the rhetoric of modern science which promises to conquer the world by discovering its mysteries and exposing its secrets.

But this is not the kind of dominion which Augustine teaches in his Trinitarian view of creation. For Augustine dominion must reflect the human vocation of being the image of God in the world: “What gives him authority? The image of God.”<sup>59</sup> Then he continued what this image of God means: “We have existence in common with stick and stones, life in common with trees, sense in common with beasts, understanding in common with angels.”<sup>60</sup> Human being is special and, in a sense, different from other creatures because of his rationality. The image of God in human being lies in his exercise of reason. And it is the right exercise of reason that gives him authority or dominion over other inferior creatures.<sup>61</sup>

Furthermore, to be the image of God, for Augustine, is to seek out God and to cling to Him in the Son and the Holy Spirit, in the particular way that God has made humanity.<sup>62</sup> All human works over creation must be done in reference to God. Dominion as a reflection of the image of God is the rule of the generosity of love which does not seek its own interest and makes it possible for others to know the love of God.

Keeping in mind Augustine’s understanding of God’s creative work, the dominion of the land or animals can be viewed as the exercise of human reason not merely in terms of their utility, but with respect to the love of the creature as God’s creation and thereby leads one to praise and love God as the creator. If human *domination* of the land and animals instead destroys creation and cause unnecessary harm to the world, then for Augustine, it can hardly be called dominion at all. For God did not create the world to enjoy its destruction and to delight in its abuse.

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<sup>59</sup>Augustine, *s.* 43, 3. (trans. Edmund Hill. Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1991). PL 38, 255: “Unde habeat potestatem? Propter imaginem Dei”.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid. *s.* 43, 4. PL 38, 255: “Habemus ergo, ut cuncta breviter retexamus, ipsum esse cum lignis et lapidibus, vivere cum arboribus, sentire cum bestiis, intellegere cum angelis”.

<sup>61</sup>A more comprehensive discussion on man as a special creature being created in the image and likeness of God is tackled by Ma. Carmen Dolby Múgica’s book: *El Hombre es Imagen de Dios. Visión Antropológica de San Agustín*, (Eunsa, Pamplona 2002).

<sup>62</sup>Augustine, *Gn. litt. inp.* 16, 59, trans. Edmund Hill (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 2002). CSEL 28, 1, 499/15-21.

*Uti et Frui*

Augustine sees the order and beauty of the world as an order of love, *ordo amoris*: ‘All natures, then, in as much as they are, and have therefore a rank and species of their own, and a kind of internal harmony, are certainly good.’<sup>63</sup> The diversity of material and spiritual things is divinely intended, and inherently good. But humans have a unique status that derives from creativity, intelligence and self-transcendence.

By reflecting on the natural order established by God in creation, Augustine developed a classic doctrine of *uti et frui*—the *use* and *fruition* of creation by man.<sup>64</sup> In his work *On Christian Doctrine*, Augustine distinguishes ‘fruition’, which is directed towards the thing itself as the source of love, from ‘using’, which recognizes a thing, not as the source of love in itself, but points beyond itself to another love:

For to enjoy a thing is to rest with satisfaction in it for its own sake. To use, on the other hand, is to employ whatever means are at one's disposal to obtain what one desires, if it is a proper object of desire; for an unlawful use ought rather to be called an abuse.<sup>65</sup>

Augustine teaches that all earthly things are meant to be ‘used’ by man because of the inherent goodness that God has endowed them with, but the ‘fruition or enjoyment’ of all things must lead man to the Creator Himself who is the source of all goodness and the proper object of man's desire. If this order of *use and fruition* is altered and creatures are enjoyed for their own sake without reference to the Creator, for Augustine it is a form of ‘abuse’. Augustine identifies God and He alone as the ultimate and proper object of man's enjoyment. Other things are available for ‘proper use’.

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<sup>63</sup>Augustine, *ciu.* 12, 5, trans. Marcus Dods, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, vol. 2, ed. Philip Schaff. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887). CCL 48, 359/1-4.

<sup>64</sup>A treatment of Augustine's classic doctrine of *uti et frui* can also be found in Andrew Brian McGowan's “To Use and Enjoy: Augustine and Ecology”, *St. Mark's Review* 212/May 2010, 89-99.

<sup>65</sup>Augustine, *doctr. chr.* 1, 4, 4, trans. J. F. Shaw, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, vol. 2, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887), Simonetti 22/1-4: “Frui est enim amore inhaerere alicui rei propter seipsam. Uti autem, quod in usum venerit ad id quod amas obtinendum referre, si tamen amandum est. Nam usus illicitus abusus potius vel abusio nominandus est”.



In his work *The Trinity*, Augustine explains how a superior creature can ‘use’ the inferior ones but must ‘enjoy’ its coequal and that which is superior to it. Concretely, he refers to the fact that being human endowed with reason, man can use nonrational creatures for his own needs, may enjoy other human beings like himself, but must encounter always the fullness of happiness in God alone. And if this order of things is reversed, man can be enslaved by temporal things; he is not anymore, a steward of creation but its slave:

When, therefore, the creature is either equal to us or inferior, we must use the inferior in order to God, but we must enjoy the equal duly in God. For as you ought to enjoy yourself, not in yourself, but in Him who made you, so also him whom you love as yourself. Let us enjoy, therefore, both ourselves and our brethren in the Lord; and hence let us not dare to yield, and as it were to relax, ourselves to ourselves in the direction downwards.<sup>66</sup>

Augustine teaches that ‘proper use’ is not merely conformity to rules, but the celebratory engagement with other humans that arises from shared participation in the *ordo amoris*. The things thus used are neither neutrally good and hence to be exploited, nor the ultimate end and so to be worshipped, but must be approached in relation to the Highest End, which is of course the origin also of all realities—God.

However, according to Augustine, because of sin, man’s ability to understand the purpose of God’s creation has been blurred: “But perhaps the slow hearts of some of you cannot yet receive that light, because they are burdened by their sins, so that they cannot see.”<sup>67</sup> For Augustine, sin not only disrupts the order of the world and the harmony among creatures, so that it tends towards nothingness, but also distorts man’s ability to see how creation exists in God. It can be likened to a blind man who stands in the sunlight but in a sense, is absent from

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<sup>66</sup>Augustine, *trin.* 9, 8, 13, trans. Arthur West Haddan, in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, vol. 3, ed. Philip Schaff. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887). PL 42, 968: “Cum ergo aut par nobis, aut inferior creatura sit, inferiore utendum est ad Deum; pari autem fruendum, sed in Deo. Sicut enim te ipso, non in te ipso frui debes, sed in eo qui fecit te; sic etiam illo quem diligis tamquam te ipsum. Et nobis ergo et fratribus in Domino fruamur, et inde nos nec ad nosmetipsos remittere, et quasi relaxare deorsum versus audeamus”.

<sup>67</sup>Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 1, 19, 1. PL 35, 1388: “Sed forte stulta corda adhuc capere istam lucem non possunt, quia peccatis suis aggravantur, ut eam videre non possint”.

the light because of the lack of eyesight. Pride, sin, and selfishness can cause a man to turn his back on God, distance himself from his fellow human beings, and enclose himself from the rest. This would lead him to alter the *ordo amoris*, abuse and exploit selfishly creation, and create chaos in world.<sup>68</sup>

The major cause of much of the ecological trouble we face today is the human use of the world without respect for the complex natural relationships by which it has been composed and the balance that it exhibits. In some respects that 'use' could be described as covetousness and greedy, perhaps even an addiction to consumption without boundaries. This could be an example of using something because it pleases man and finding ultimate love in himself. If this happens, man does not anymore act as steward of creation but its proprietor who lords over and exploits creation unto disorder and destruction.

In the mind of Augustine, man is just part of God's creation, but among all creatures he has the vocation to love others and to love God above all things. The *ordo amoris* which regulates the relationship among creatures, and between the creatures and the Creator, dictates that it is necessary to love the Creator for being the Highest Good, and not to love creation independently of its Creator. In accordance to this principle, the right use of the created things must lead man to love God and give Him the praise and glory He deserves, as St. Augustine points out in the exposition of the Psalm (144, 4):

For how great things besides has His boundless Goodness and illimitable Greatness made, which we do not know! When we lift the gaze of our eyes even to the heaven, and then recall it from sun, moon, and stars to the earth, and there is all this space where our sight can wander; beyond the heavens who can extend the eyesight of his mind, not to say of his flesh? So far then as His works are known to us, "let us praise Him through His works" (Romans 1:20). "Generation and generation shall praise Your works" (Psalm 144:4). Every generation shall praise Your works.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>Cf. Augustine, *Gn. litt. inp.* 1, 3.

<sup>69</sup>Augustine, *en. Ps.* 144, 4. PL 36, 1872: "Illius enim immensa bonitas et interminabilis magnitudo, quanta alia fecit quae nos non novimus? Quando quidem aciem oculorum nostrorum usque ad coelum extendimus, et a sole et a luna et a stellis rursus revocamus ad terram; et hoc totum spatium est ubi vagatur acies nostra: ultra coelos quis extendat vel aciem mentis, non dicam carnis? Ergo quantum nota sunt nobis opera eius, laudemus eum per opera eius. Invisibilia enim eius, a constitutione mundi, per ea quae facta sunt intellecta conspiciuntur. Generatio et generatio laudabit opera tua. Omnis generatio laudabit opera tua".

God's command to subdue the earth in the book of Genesis is a call to use creation according to the *ordo amoris*, and not to exploit it. Our failure in our dealings with one another and with creation, and with God, may have resulted from the confusion or substitution of what is 'to be used' with what is 'to be enjoyed'. In making ourselves gods over creation, we abuse God, ourselves, and the world whose care is our inherent vocation. If we make created things our gods, we would pursue wealth in such a way that we would also abuse creation, rather than serving or sustaining it.

### The Divine Providence

From the ecological perspective, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that for Augustine, the Scriptural narrative that God, after completing the work of creation on the seventh day, has rested (Gn 2, 1-3), does not imply that God stops His creative activity on the world or leave the world in absolute autonomy, operating on its own, but that the work of creation continues through the divine act of sustaining and conserving the universe. Augustine begins with the concept of 'ontological dependence' on the part of the contingent creatures. Ontologically speaking, every creature tends to nothingness since it was drawn to existence by God from nothing. If the Trinitarian God does not positively sustain creation with His creative power, it would simply regress to non-existence. Only the all-powerful God can preserve it from total annihilation. After creating, as Augustine points out, God administers everything He created and sustains its being:

God can also be understood to have rested from establishing different kinds of creatures, because he did not now establish any new kinds anymore. But he rested like this in such a way as to continue from then on and up till now to operate the management of the things that were then set in place, not as though at least on the seventh day his power was withheld from the government of heaven and earth and of all the things he has established; if that had been done, they would forthwith have collapsed into nothingness.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 4, 12, 22. Trans. By Edmund Hill, OP. From the Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Vol. 13, ed. J. E. Rotelle, OSA (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2002), 253. PL 34, 304: "Potest etiam intellegi Deum requievisse a condendis generibus creaturae, quia ultra iam non condidit aliqua genera nova: deinceps autem usque nunc et ultra operari eorundem generum administrationem, quae tunc instituta sunt; non ut ipso saltem die septimo potentia eius a coeli et terrae, omniumque rerum quas condiderat, gubernatione cessaret, alioquin continuo dilaberentur".

Augustine compares God's creative work with that of a mason or an architect. Just as the builder can build a house and leave it there after, and the house will continue to exist on its own since it was produced from pre-existent materials, the same principle cannot be applied with creation. Creation was produced from nothing, i.e., there was no pre-existing matter. Hence God's providence must be present continually in creation, sustaining and governing it. The Augustinian phrase is captivating:

It is not, you see, like a mason building houses; when he has finished, he goes away, and his work goes on standing when he has stopped working on it and gone away. No, the world will not be able to go on standing for a single moment if God withdraws from it his controlling hand.<sup>71</sup>

Therefore, for Augustine, God continues to be present in creation continually willing its existence. Furthermore, God continues to govern creation and all creatures through divine providence. The common home, which is the entire universe, continues to be governed, administered, and cared for by God Himself. Augustine points out that the care God has for His house, which is the universe, is far greater than the care any father of the house can ever give to his own household:

If you object to their not being of any use, be thankful they do not harm, because even if they are not needed for our homes, at any rate contribute to the completion of this universe, which is not only much bigger than our homes, but much better as well; God manages it after all, much better than any of us can manage our homes.<sup>72</sup>

On the other hand, Augustine argues that God's governance and providence are not so imposing as to deprive creatures of their autonomy or active participation in the realization or determination of their being. Contrary to the feminist or post-colonialist criticisms, accusing

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid. PL 34, 304: "Neque enim, sicut structor aedium cum fabricaverit, abscedit, atque illo cessante atque abscedente stat opus eius; ita mundus vel ictu oculi stare poterit, si ei Deus regimen sui subtraxerit".

<sup>72</sup>Augustine, *Gn. adu. Man.* 1, 16, 26. Trans. By Edmund Hill, OP. From the Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Vol. 13, ed. J. E. Rotelle, OSA (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2002), 56. PL 34, 360: Si tibi displicet quod non prosunt, placeat quod non obsunt; quia etsi domui nostrae non sunt necessaria, eis tamen completur huius universitatis integritas, quae multo maior est quam domus nostra et multo melior. Hanc enim multo melius administrat Deus, quam unusquisque nostrum domum suam.

Augustinian's doctrine—and with it the traditional doctrinal approach of the Church—of being patriarchal, sexist or even “imperialist”, Augustine actually teaches that the power of God is exercised not with force or violence, as is the case with human empires and kingdoms on earth. God's governance of the universe is based on His infinite wisdom. God directs the course of history and the development of the universe with divine wisdom and mercy so that everything converges perfectly according to the divine plan. And the ultimate destiny of creation is perfect rest, which is pure joy and happiness, as Augustine succinctly describe it: “The weight without weight to which are drawn, in order to rest there, those whose rest is pure joy is not itself drawn to anything else beyond it.”<sup>73</sup>

According to the Augustinian thought, following the Aristotelian physics, all creatures in the universe are unstable or restless, and they tend towards a place or condition where they settle down and be at rest. Irrational creatures can find temporary rest in some elements. But Man, being created in the image and likeness of God, cannot find rest except in God alone, because as Augustine points out: “You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You”.<sup>74</sup> For this reason, along with the entire creation, man seeks the ‘*quies*’, that rest in God. Hence, in Augustine's thought, ‘protology’ is fundamentally linked with ‘eschatology’. Every being is created and moves in time towards a purpose predetermined by God in eternity.

It is true that in the course of time, as the entire creation progresses towards its fullness, the order of the universe, the ecological order, the intra-historical order, and the *Ordo Amoris*, are all altered by sin. However, for Augustine the world ultimately is not determined by the uncertainty of human history, nor is it subject to the vagaries of the world. In ways incomprehensible to men, everything in the world, and

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<sup>73</sup>Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 4, 4, 8. Trans. By Edmund Hill, OP. From the Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Vol. 13, ed. J. E. Rotelle, OSA (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2002), 247. PL 34, 300. *Pondus sine pondere est, quo referuntur ut quiescant, quorum quies purum gaudium est, nec illud iam refertur ad aliud.*

<sup>74</sup>Augustine, *conf. 1, 1*. Trans. by J.G. Pilkington. From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 1. Edited by Philip Schaff. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887). PL 32, 661: “quia fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum, donec quiescat in te”.

in fact the entire universe itself is still guided by the divine order. In mysterious ways, God continues to carry out His plan of salvation and will make everything right in His own time. But God does it not with force or violence, as is typical of human beings, but with the softness or sweetness of His wisdom, since God arranges everything gently, as Augustine points out when commenting on the biblical text of Wis 8:1:

And then there is what is written about his Wisdom: *she reaches from end to end mightily, and arranges all things sweetly* (Wis 8: 1), about whom it is also written that her movement is swifter and more nimble than all movements (Wis 7: 24); from this it is clear enough to those who look into the matter rightly that she bestows this incomparable and inexpressible and this—if you can grasp it—this motionless movement of hers upon things by disposing them sweetly, so that undoubtedly if this is withdrawn, and she abstains from this activity, they will perish forthwith.<sup>75</sup>

And despite the fact that the historical and ecological order may seem to have been altered in the present-day world, everything will finally be set right because the providence of God that governs the universe seeks that all beings in the universe will exist again in harmony; that original harmony which was ruined when the *Ordo Amoris* was altered and caused the rupture of the balance within nature, and within the relationships of men with each other:

From this the eye of the mind can now be raised up to the universe itself as if it were all some huge tree, and this too will be discovered the same twin functioning of providence, partly through natural, partly through voluntary activity; through natural activity indeed is working the hidden management of God, by which he also gives growth to the trees and herbs, while voluntary activity comes through the works of angels and human beings. As regards the first mode celestial things are arrayed up above, terrestrial ones down below, the great lights and constellation shine, day and night are

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<sup>75</sup>Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 4, 12, 23. Trans. By Edmund Hill, OP. From the Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Vol. 13, ed. J. E. Rotelle, OSA (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2002), 254. PL 34, 304: “Et quod scriptum est de sapientia eius: Pertingit a fine usque ad finem fortiter, et disponit omnia suaviter; de qua item scriptum est, quod motus eius agilior celeriorque sit omnibus motibus: satis apparet recte intuentibus, hunc ipsum incomparabilem et ineffabilem, et si possit intellegi, stabilem motum suum, rebus eam praeberere suaviter disponendis; quo utique subtracto, si ab hac operatione cessaverit, eas continuo perituras.”

moved around in return, the earth with its foundations in the waters has them washing round it and in amongst it, the air is poured over it at a higher level, shrubs and animals are conceived and born, grow up, grow old and perish, and whatever else happens in things through the inner impulses of nature: while in this other mode signs are given, taught and learned, fields cultivated, communities administered, arts and skills practiced, and whatever else is done, whether in the higher company of the angels or in this earthly and mortal society, in such a way as to be in the interests of the good even through the unwitting actions of the bad. And in the human individual we see the same twin power of providence at work; first with respect to the body, nature provides for its coming to be, its growth, its aging, while the provision of food, clothing, shelter, health care is left to voluntary activity; likewise with respect to the soul, nature insures that it is alive, sentient and conscious, while to learn and give its consent is left to the will.<sup>76</sup>

## Eschatological Perspective

In the Augustinian ecological thoughts, the beauty of creation has also an eschatological significance. According to this world view, the care on the environment and the common planetary home, must be motivated by that eschatological vision where all created things will find its perfection and completion at the moment of recapitulation

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<sup>76</sup>Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 8, 9, 17. Trans. By Edmund Hill, OP. From the Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Vol. 13, ed. J. E. Rotelle, OSA (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2002), 357-8. PL 34, 379-380: "Hinc iam in ipsum mundum, velut in quamdam magnam arborem rerum, oculus cogitationis attollitur; atque in ipso quoque gemina operatio providentiae reperitur, partim naturalis, partim voluntaria. Et naturalis quidem per occultam Dei administrationem, qua etiam lignis et herbis dat incrementum; voluntaria vero, per Angelorum opera et hominum. Secundum illam primam coelestia superius ordinari, inferiusque terrestria; luminaria sideraque fulgere, diei noctisque vices agitari, aquis terram fundatam interlui atque circumlui, aerem altius superfundi, arbusta et animalia concipi et nasci, crescere et senescere, occidere, et quidquid aliud in rebus interiore naturalique motu geritur. In hac autem altera signa dari, doceri et disci, agros coli, societates administrari, artes exerceri, et quaeque alia sive in superna societate aguntur, sive in hac terrena atque mortali, ita ut bonis consulatur et per nescientes malos. Inque ipso homine eandem geminam providentiae vigere potentiam: primo erga corpus naturalem, scilicet eo motu quo fit, quo crescit, quo senescit; voluntariam vero, quo illi ad victum, tegumentum, curationemque consulitur. Similiter erga animam naturaliter agitur ut vivat, ut sentiat; voluntarie vero ut discat, ut consentiat."

(Eph 1, 10), in the manifestation of the Son of Man. Hence, the admiration and praise of creation must not be fixated on earthly things but must lead the human mind to transcend and contemplate on the higher beauty, which in the eschatological vision of St. Paul, the 'beauty' which God prepares in the City of God where "no eye has ever seen nor any ear has ever heard what God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Cor 2, 9). The whole creation is heading towards perfection, towards a consummation beyond this present world. Hence, ecology for Augustine does not only have a historical and temporal meaning. While it recognizes and contemplates the earthly beauty, the Augustinian ecological thinking goes beyond the perceivable; it is in a sense transcendent. This transcendence has two nuances: the eschatological and the sacramental.

The beauty of creation according to Augustine has a transcendent dimension in an eschatological sense, because as St. Paul says "now we only see things as in a mirror; later in the kingdom of heaven, we will be able to see the beauty of God as it truly is" (1 Cor 13, 12). The entire creation will reach its fullness in God. For this reason, Augustine, in his work *the City of God*, invites his readers to allow themselves, on the one hand, 'to be amazed' by the beauty which surrounds them, but on the other hand, to be aware that this earthly beauty is nothing but a foretaste of that 'beauty' prepared by God in the kingdom of heaven. It deals with the text in which Augustine enumerates various creatures and invites his readers to contemplate their inherent beauty and harmony, such as those which may exist in the body of an ant or a bee, which as Augustine confesses, he prefers the perfection of the body of a whale,<sup>77</sup> just as he admires the microscopic perfection of the body of an ant, more than the magnificence of a river when it is being crossed riding on a great donkey.<sup>78</sup> Or perhaps Augustine stops at describing the beauty of the sea and its various colors and shades, to finally point out that this beauty of the present world is nothing compared to the beauty that one day will be manifest in the kingdom of heaven:

How can I tell of the rest of creation, with all its beauty and utility, which the divine goodness has given to man to please his eye and serve his purposes, condemned though he is, and hurled into these labors and miseries? Shall I speak of the manifold and various loveliness of sky, and earth, and sea; of the plentiful supply and

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<sup>77</sup>Cf. Augustine, *ciu.* 22, 24.

<sup>78</sup>Cf. Augustine, *Gn. adu. Man.* 1, 26.



wonderful qualities of the light; of sun, moon, and stars; of the shade of trees; of the colors and perfume of flowers; of the multitude of birds, all differing in plumage and in song; of the variety of animals, of which the smallest in size are often the most wonderful — the works of ants and bees astonishing us more than the huge bodies of whales? Shall I speak of the sea, which itself is so grand a spectacle (...) And all these are but the solace of the wretched and condemned, not the rewards of the blessed. What then shall these rewards be, if such be the blessings of a condemned state? What will He give to those whom He has predestined to life, who has given such things even to those whom He has predestined to death?<sup>79</sup>

Also, for Augustine, the beauty of the world and the entire creation has a sacramental meaning, a sign which serves as an invitation to discover God as its Creator and to give Him praise. It is a sort of voice which creation directs to every human being. But at times men are so deafened by worldly voices of consumerism or materialism that they cannot recognize the voice of God in creation. Certainly, as one of the

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<sup>79</sup>Augustine, *ciu.* 22, 24. trans. by Marcus Dods. From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 2. Edited by Philip Schaff. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887. PL 41, 791-792: “Iam cetera pulchritudo et utilitas creaturae, quae homini, licet in istos labores miserasque proiecto atque damnato, spectanda atque sumenda divina largitate concessa est, quo sermone terminari potest? in caeli et terrae et maris multimoda et varia pulchritudine, in ipsius lucis tanta copia tamque mirabili specie, in sole ac luna et sideribus, in opacitatibus nemorum, in coloribus et odoribus florum, in diversitate ac multitudine volucrum garrularum atque pictarum, in multiformi specie tot tantarumque animantium, quarum illae plus habent admirationis, quae molis minimum (plus enim formicarum et apicularum opera stupemus quam immensa corpora ballaenarum), in ipsius quoque maris tam grandi spectaculo, cum sese diversis coloribus velut vestibis induit et aliquando viride atque hoc multis modis, aliquando purpureum, aliquando caeruleum est. Quam porro delectabiliter spectatur etiam quandocumque turbatur, et fit inde maior suavitas, quia sic demulcet intuentem, ut non iacet et quatiat navigantem! Quid ciborum usquequaque copia contra famem? quid saporum diversitas contra fastidium, naturae diffusa divitiis, non coquorum arte ac labore quaesita? quid in tam multis rebus tuendae aut recipiendae salutis auxilia! Quam grata vicissitudo diei alternantis et noctis! Aurarum quam blanda temperies! In fruticibus et pecoribus indumentorum conficiendorum quanta materies! Omnia commemorare quis possit? Haec autem sola, quae a me velut in quemdam sunt aggerem coartata, si vellem velut colligata involucria solvere atque discutere, quanta mihi mora esset in singulis, quibus plurima continentur! Et haec omnia miserorum sunt damnatorumque solacia, non praemia beatorum. Quae igitur illa sunt, si tot et talia ac tanta sunt ista? Quid dabit eis quos praedestinavit ad vitam, qui haec dedit etiam eis quos praedestinavit ad mortem?”

classical specialists on ecology Aldo Leopold has pointed out, ecology is a matter of love and respect. In his book, *A Sand County Almanac*, he asserts:

(...) It is inconceivable to me that an ethical relation to land can exist without love, respect, and admiration of land, and a high regard for its value. By value, I of course mean, something far broader than mere economic value; I mean value in the philosophical sense.<sup>80</sup>

The same is true for Augustine. It is important to respect and care for the world so that it can continue to be a sacrament of God, a sign of his love, of his greatness and continue to call on human beings to transcend. In the *Confessions*, Augustine recounts how all the creatures in heaven and on earth cried out to him from everywhere with the voice of their beauty inviting him to love God. The irrational creatures cannot love God the way human being does for they do not possess reason, nor a heart into which the Holy Spirit can be poured into. So, for Augustine, they cry to man with their beauty and remind him that he must love and praise God:

You have stricken my heart with Your word, and I loved You. And also the heaven, and earth, and all that is therein, behold, on every side they say that I should love You; nor do they cease to speak unto all, so that they are without excuse.<sup>81</sup>

Moreover, Augustine stresses that creation is tangible and therefore, can be studied scientifically. In fact, there are people who have become deeply knowledgeable of nature, the course of the stars and their natural laws. But such great knowledge does not guarantee that they will acknowledge the Creator. At time, too full of themselves, they refuse to acknowledge the 'greater force' they do not see. As St. Paul points out in his first letter to the Corinthians; 'science inflates, and only charity edifies' (1 Cor 8, 1). Augustine adds one more element to this Pauline reflection. He points out that there can be people who approach creation as if it were a mere object of study. They may succeed in

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<sup>80</sup>A. Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1968, 223.

<sup>81</sup>Augustine, *conf.* 10, 8. trans. by J.G. Pilkington. From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 1. Edited by Philip Schaff. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887. PL 32, 782: "Percussisti cor meum verbo tuo, et amavi te. Sed et caelum et terra et omnia, quae in eis sunt, ecce undique mihi dicunt, ut te amem, nec cessant dicere omnibus, ut sint inexcusabiles."

knowing rationally so much about the creatures and the universe. They have become so learned on many things but have never become wise. They are foolish because they fail to recognize an essential dimension of nature, i.e., its being a sign or a sacrament of God. As Augustine declares:

The man, however, who puts so high a value on these things as to be inclined to boast himself one of the learned, and who does not rather inquire after the source from which those things which he perceives to be true derive their truth, and from which those others which he perceives to be unchangeable also derive their truth and unchangeableness, and who, mounting up from bodily appearances to the mind of man, and finding that it too is changeable (for it is sometimes instructed, at other times uninstructed), although it holds a middle place between the unchangeable truth above it and the changeable things beneath it, does not strive to make all things redound to the praise and love of the one God from whom he knows that all things have their being — the man, I say, who acts in this way may seem to be learned, but wise he cannot in any sense be deemed.<sup>82</sup>

Another interesting dimension of Augustine's eschatological thought is his projection of the redeemed City of God with the presence of irrational creatures and material realities. It seems that for Augustine, the whole of creation—not just humanity alone—but man along with the animals and the entire physical universe are destined to be transformed in the new City. David Meconi in an interesting article points out that it is highly likely that in the Augustinian thinking, there would be animals or other living beings in the city of God. Meconi makes an analysis of a text from *De ciuitate Dei*, where Augustine speaks, on the one hand, of the bodies of the chosen and saints of God, and on the other hand,

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<sup>82</sup>Augustine, *doctr. chr.* 2, 38, 57. trans. by James Shaw. From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 2. Edited by Philip Schaff. PL 34, 61-62: “Quae tamen omnia quisquis ita dilexerit ut iactare se inter imperitos velit, et non potius quaerere unde sint vera quae tantummodo vera esse persenserit, et unde quaedam non solum vera, sed etiam incommutabilia, quae incommutabilia esse comprehenderit, ac sic a specie corporum usque ad humanam mentem perveniens, cum et ipsam mutabilem invenerit, quod nunc docta, nunc indocta sit, constituta tamen inter incommutabilem supra se veritatem, et mutabilia infra se cetera, ad unius Dei laudem atque dilectionem cuncta convertere a quo cuncta esse cognoscit, doctus videri potest, esse autem sapiens nullo modo.”

the text also indicates that together with them, is the presence of other material bodies (*corporalia*) that will subsist together with the bodies of the elect (*corpora*):

Wherefore it may very well be, and it is thoroughly credible, that we shall in the future world see the material forms of the new heavens and the new earth in such a way that we shall most distinctly recognize God everywhere present and governing all things, material as well as spiritual, and shall see Him, not as now we understand the invisible things of God, by the things which are made, and see Him darkly, as in a mirror, and in part, and rather by faith than by bodily vision of material appearances, but by means of the bodies we shall wear and which we shall see wherever we turn our eyes.<sup>83</sup>

An in-depth analysis of this text made Meconi reach a conclusion that possibly Augustine projects or foresees that in the new heaven there will also be animals and material realities, which in God's mysterious way can also reach their perfection and fullness in the city of God. Having said that, it is also important to consider two other Augustinian ideas. On the one hand, for Augustine, the consummation of all things in the *eschaton* does not imply the total destruction of creation, but rather its transformation, its perfection, the moment of its manifestation, as St. John indicates 'how we shall be in the future, because we will see God as He really is' (1 Jn 3, 2). On the other hand, Augustine indicates that in the city of God once the earthly pilgrimage comes to an end and the two cities are established forever and definitively, in the city of God, the chosen ones will have everything necessary to achieve perfect happiness and the unnecessary will cease to be. In sermon 242, Augustine comments:

So, we are asked, "If the body's liability to decay is not going to rise again, why did the Lord Christ eat?" Well, you can read that he ate: can you read that he was hungry? That he ate was a matter of his power, not of his need. If he had a craving to eat, he would have been in need. Again, if he hadn't been able to eat, it would have

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<sup>83</sup>Augustine, *ciu.* 22, 29, 6. Trans. by Marcus Dods. From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 2. Edited by Philip Schaff. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887.). PL 41, 800: "Quamobrem fieri potest valdeque credibile est sic nos viros mundana tunc corpora caeli novi et terrae novae, ut Deum ubique praesentem et universa etiam corporalia gubernantem per corpora quae gestabimus et quae conspiciemus, quaquaversum oculos duxerimus, clarissima perspicuitate videamus, non sicut nunc invisibilia Dei per ea, quae facta sunt, intellecta conspiciuntur per speculum in aenigmate et ex parte, ubi plus in nobis valet fides, quam credimus, quam rerum corporalium species, quam per oculos cernimus corporals".

meant he had less capability. Did even angels fail to eat, when they were given hospitality by our ancestors (Gen. 18: 1-9) and yet they were not liable to decay?<sup>84</sup>

God governs all things with His infinite wisdom, and He knows what is best for each moment. At times, He allows negative things to happen but so that He can draw goodness out of them. Nothing escapes from His eternal plan, as He is the immutable ruler of the constantly changing world, as Augustine indicates:

For the change suitable to the present age has been enjoined by God, who knows infinitely better than man what is fitting for every age, and who is, whether He give or add, abolish or curtail, increase or diminish, the unchangeable Governor as He is the unchangeable Creator of mutable things.<sup>85</sup>

And in His provident administration of the universe, guided by his omniscient wisdom, God is likened by Augustine to a great conductor of an orchestra, like a great musician who knows how to integrate the various sounds and quietude, the apparent dissonances and consonances, in order to produce a refined harmony, a soothing music. In the same manner, among those who will be singing praise to God in the *eschaton*, will be the irrational creatures, who by their existence, will participate in contemplating forever the beauty of the Creator:

The component parts of which are the dispensations adapted to each successive age, shall be finished, like the grand melody of some ineffably wise master of song, and those pass into the eternal immediate contemplation of God who here, though it is a time of faith, not of sight, are acceptably worshipping Him.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup>Augustine, *s.* 242, 2. Trans. by Edmund Hill, OP. From the Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, Part III, Vol. 7. Edited by J. E. Rotelle, OSA (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1993), 79. PL 38, 1139-1140: *Dicitur ergo nobis: Si corruptio corporis non resurget, quare manducavit Dominus Christus? Legistis quia manducavit, numquid legistis quia esurivit? Quod manducavit, potestatis fuit, non egestatis. Si desideraret manducare, egeret. Rursus si manducare non posset, minus valeret. Numquid et Angeli, quando suscepti sunt hospitio a patribus nostris, non manducaverunt? 4, et tamen corruptibiles non fuerunt?*

<sup>85</sup>Augustine, *ep.* 138, 5. Trans. by J.G. Cunningham. From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 1. Edited by Philip Schaff. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887). PL 33, 527: “quod huic tempori aptum esset, qui multo magis quam homo novit quid cuique tempori accommodate adhibeatur; quid quando impertiat, addat, auferat, detrahat, augeat, minuatur, immutabilis mutabilium, sicut creator, ita moderator”.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid. PL 33, 527: “cuius particulae sunt quae suis quibusque temporibus aptae sunt, velut magnum carmen cuiusdam ineffabilis modulantis excurrat, atque inde transeant in aeternam contemplationem speciei qui Deum rite colunt, etiam cum tempus est fidei.”

## Conclusion

As we have seen above, the Augustinian thought on creation is extremely rich so that it helps us to discover different essential elements that can guide our present-day ecological reflection in the light of the ecological concerns of *Laudato Si'*. An essential factor to consider is that the Augustinian thinking always starts from the Sacred Scripture. Augustine's reflection on creation and the environment is marked by its constant adherence to the Word of God. He draws the essential ideas which guide the relationship that man must have with nature particularly from the creation stories, keeping in mind that the Creator of all is the triune God, and that creation has a soteriological dimension, continually moving towards that fullness and perfection in eternity.

On the other hand, creation for Augustine is like a book that speaks of God's beauty and greatness. It is a book that is not written with ink and parchment, but with living beings, which do not stop proclaiming the greatness of their maker. Therefore, the conservation and care of nature has a meaning not only in a practical and secular sense; that is, to take care of nature so that it can continue to be a source of satisfaction for the aesthetic needs of human beings. In its transcendental dimension, the entire world is also a *sacramentum*, it is a sign that speaks of God and that it invites human beings to raise their eyes and hearts towards transcendent realities.

Moreover, human beings, in their relationship with creation, cannot lose sight of their role as stewards and custodians of creation, since God has placed all things at their service, so that he can make them grow and lead them back to God. But in relation to the world, man is simply an administrator and not the owner of everything that exists in creation. The Augustinian doctrine of creation rejects the irrational exploitation of natural resources, as well as, on the part of man, the feeling of domination and absolute possession of the things of the earth. For the Bishop of Hippo, the human being has the task to take care of creation so that it continues to be bountiful and can satisfy the needs of the present and future generations, and so that the world can continue to be a living sign that speaks to all human beings of the goodness and greatness of God.

Finally, the Bishop of Hippo is very aware of the social dimension of creation and the goods of nature and is forthright in condemning the abusive, exclusive, and discriminating possession of these natural goods. Everything must be at the service of all men, and creation is made so bountiful so that no human being lacks what is essential for this earthly life. *Laudato Si'* talks of “ecological sin” which is man’s rupturing of the bonds of union with his Creator, with his fellow human beings, and with the rest of creation. It calls to “acknowledge sins against creation” and make a deep and personal repentance which may lead to the so-called “ecological conversion”.

Only from an authentic ecological conversion, that is to say, a conversion which begins in the human heart, that one is able to perceive the sacramental, social, and theological dimension of the world and nature; and only when one has the right perspective that he can begin to build a true ecology. Ecologies which are built on “crypto-pantheistic” ideologies or ecologies which hide other self-vested interests cannot be part of the solution. It is important to build a true Christian ecology, where the human being is recognized as an integral part of creation, yet at the same time, play an important role as its custodian; the one who leads creation guided by the eschatological vision where all created things will find its perfection and completion at the moment of recapitulation (Eph 1, 10), in the manifestation of the Son of Man.

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## Recollect Augustinianness Against the Rhetoric of Consumerism

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### *Abstract*

*Consumerism cultivates our desire to acquire more. It knows more of our needs and interests than ourselves by the use of search engines, social media, and cookies. It aggressively seduces people to buy, to acquire things in order to be happy. Billions are poured into researching behaviors, tastes, attitudes, and aspirations so as to find the particular weak spot that will unlock the key to people's desires and fantasies. The powerful seduction of consumerism is the advertisement of a happy life that can be gained through purchasing. It targets mainly our emotions, our imagination, and our desires to pursue happiness. The appeal of consumerism is designed to compel us to buy. It invades our hearts and the subconscious level of our minds. We live in the consumer city constantly bombarded with the temptation to purchase.*

*The rhetoric of consumerism impacted not only the ordinary person but also professed religious and priests. Sometimes the religious are more persuasive evangelizers of the consumer city rather than the City of God. They patronize, testify, and preach about the products and brands they used.*

*St. Augustine and the OAR founding fathers did not have OLED television, a dishwasher, air conditioning, a cellphone, tablet, laptop, drones, and other high-tech gadgets. They did not have these things but they were happy. St. Augustine and the OAR founding fathers even asserted that it is better to need less than to have more. They searched for a true happy life in a monastic life without luxuries. They are against the rhetoric of consumerism on the issue of happiness. The article will be about the Augustinian option of happiness as lived by the OAR founding fathers.*

Key Words; Consumerism, Augustinianness, Rhetoric, Augustinian option, happiness

## Introduction

Augustine said that the yearning for happiness is engraved in the human heart. We all are interested in being happy.<sup>1</sup> Augustine pursued happiness all his life. In fact, he wrote a book entitled *De Beata Vita (On the Happy Life)*. His other writings such as *Confessions* and *De Trinitate* converged on the pursuit of happiness. Augustine knows our desire and interest for happiness. His opus can serve as a beacon for those who are serious in finding true happiness in a consumer city. Augustine can aid us to challenge the claims of consumerism regarding the attainment of a happy life. He will help us make the right and well-grounded choices in building a happy life while immersed in the consumer world.

This article will deal with the notion and attainment of happiness in the perspective of consumerism and of Augustine. The rhetoric, impact, and dark side of consumerism will be discussed. The highlights of the Divine rhetoric animated by the observantine congregations within the Augustinian Order will be presented in broad strokes. Such highlights assimilated by the Augustinian Recollects will be asserted as superior sources and ways in the quest of happiness than the consumerist path to happiness.

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<sup>1</sup>Augustine, *On the Happy Life: St. Augustine's Cassiciacum Dialogues*, translated by Michael Foley, London: Yale University Press, 2019, 2.10.

## Consumerism on Happy Life

Bruce Rittenhouse defined consumerism as “a form of life chosen and practiced by individuals interacting with cultural processes.”<sup>2</sup> An example is a life lived with the preoccupation of acquiring or consuming material goods so as to gain pleasure. For this reason St. John Paul II defined consumerism in association with materialism. It is a form of life in the pursuit of happiness by the acquisition of material goods. Thus in this context, happiness means the enjoyment of economic prosperity, physical beauty, and pleasures.<sup>3</sup>

Consumerism within its theological context is a replacement of religious traditions.<sup>4</sup> In like manner, Laura Hartman defines it as “identity-forming and meaning-making activity that competes with religious practice in its importance for human’s sense of self and community.” Thus, consumerism goes beyond the satisfaction of material needs and connotes a formative practice that shapes the individual’s life-orientation and his or her basic outlook in life.<sup>5</sup> Consumerism markets happiness by providing the materialistic needs of each consumer. Its imperialistic marketing strategy can reorient the person’s desires in the quest of a happy life. It cultivates one’s desire to consume products so as to attain immediate happiness. Consumerism is a kind of spirituality that promotes a style of pursuing meaning and identity and a way of connecting with other people.<sup>6</sup> It can rival or replace one’s outlook in

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<sup>2</sup>Bruce P. Rittenhouse, *Shopping for Meaningful Lives: The Religious Motive of Consumerism*, Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e093mww&AN=612522&site=ehost-live>.

<sup>3</sup>Bruce P. Rittenhouse. 2013. *Shopping for Meaningful Lives : The Religious Motive of Consumerism*. Eugene, Or: Cascade Books. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e093mww&AN=612522&site=ehost-live>.

<sup>4</sup>[https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0039338X.2020.1751278/accessed/November 24, 2021](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0039338X.2020.1751278/accessed/November%2024,2021).

<sup>5</sup>Fredrick Fortin“Consumerism as a moral attitude: Defining consumerism through the works of Pope Francis, Cornel West, and William T. Cavanaugh” (*Studia Theologica - Nordic Journal of Theology*), 2020, vol. 74, no. 1, 4-24. See also [https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0039338X.2020.1751278/accessed/November 24, 2021](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0039338X.2020.1751278/accessed/November%2024,2021).

<sup>6</sup>[https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0039338X.2020.1751278/accessed/November 24, 2021](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0039338X.2020.1751278/accessed/November%2024,2021).

the quest of happiness. For example, instead of Rene Descartes' "I think, therefore I am," consumers would rather say "I shop, therefore I am." Consumer city use branded lifestyles to influence the basic beliefs of a person.

The concept of happiness in consumerism is elusive. Ruut Veenhoven et al enumerated definitions of happiness but in general, it is an assessment of the quality of life as favorable rather than unfavorable.<sup>7</sup> Daniel Hayborn explored the meaning of happiness ranging from its Greek's concept up to the present. His generic notion of happiness comprises as a state of the mind and life that goes well.<sup>8</sup> Hayborn presented some basic notions of happiness: as a pleasure; as a positive emotional condition; as a state of feeling safe and secure; as engaged in meaningful and fulfilling activities; and as a sense of life satisfaction.<sup>9</sup> It must be noted that even if one experiences such notions, it does not automatically mean one is happy.<sup>10</sup> One may have favorable feelings but can be assessed as unhappy. For example, there are persons affected by the unconscious drive stimulating negative emotional mood in the person that can affect the conscious positive feelings. Another person may not demonstrate favorable feelings but does not mean he or she is miserable. Those who have a sense of contentment and fulfillment can still be considered happy even if they do not project positive emotional feelings. Some may be secured with health and wealth but at the same time become paranoid of losing his or her possessions.

The notions of happiness mentioned above can serve as indicators or measures of happiness. There is a need for an assessment of life situations so as to say one is happy or miserable. The famous measure of happiness in the consumer city is that of having a favorable emotional condition. Perfect life in the consumer city comprises a prosperous consumption lifestyle, comfort, good social esteem, pleasures and good physical looks.<sup>11</sup> Hayborn says that people tend to associate happiness

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<sup>7</sup><https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2158244020986239/abstract/23.7.21>, 2

<sup>8</sup>Daniel Hayborn, *Happiness: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press: 2013, 12.

<sup>9</sup>Daniel Hayborn, *Happiness*, 10.

<sup>10</sup>Cf. Daniel Hayborn, *Happiness*, 13-28.

<sup>11</sup>Bruce P. Rittenhouse, *Shopping for Meaningful Lives*, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e093mww&AN=612522&site=ehost-live>.

with “feeling happy” rather than “being happy.” They immediately assess people with smiling faces and cheerful mood as happy. Feeling happy usually is a by-product of the gains and successes of an individual or a group.<sup>12</sup>

According to Hayborn, experts commonly agree on the following sources of happiness: security, outlook, autonomy, relationships, skilled and meaningful activity, competence, and relatedness.<sup>13</sup> Security promotes happiness if there is no threat of losing whatever wealth we have. Security in material possessions is a very familiar source of happiness for many, whereas poverty is a source of unhappiness.<sup>14</sup> Outlook affects our path to the joys in life. Negative and unrealistic outlook will likely result in miserable outcomes. Thus, a promising positive outlook promotes happiness. Autonomy, that is, having a sense of control over one’s life, is another familiar source of happiness<sup>15</sup> especially to the young who want to explore. Many rejoice if they feel free to do anything without any constraint from an authority. With more freedom comes greater happiness. Relationships such as family, friends, and community are probably the most needed sources in finding happiness. The pleasure of socializing, mutual understanding and concern, enjoyment of each other’s company, and mutual trust, promote positive emotions in every individual.<sup>16</sup> The exercise of skill coupled with meaningful activities induces a feeling of fulfillment and creates an impact on the well-being of a person,<sup>17</sup> for example, a teacher who enjoys educating students and considers his or her work as a kind of vocation. Hayborn added other sources of happiness. Contact with nature promotes health and pleasure. Money perhaps is a really famous source of happiness in a consumer world. Surprisingly, there is no mention of God as a very potent source of happiness. Although in passing, religion, good government, achieving goals, self-esteem, being employed, etc.. are stimulants of a happy life.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Daniel Hayborn, *Happiness*, 18-19.

<sup>13</sup>Cf. Daniel Hayborn, *Happiness*, 54 ff.

<sup>14</sup>Daniel Hayborn, *Happiness*, 17.

<sup>15</sup>Daniel Hayborn, *Happiness*, 65.

<sup>16</sup>Daniel Hayborn, *Happiness*, 67.

<sup>17</sup>Daniel Hayborn, *Happiness*, 71.

<sup>18</sup>Daniel Hayborn, *Happiness*, 71-72.



It must be noted that too much emphasis on these sources of happiness may result in misery. For example, a parent's obsession to provide material security and comfort will turn a child into a spoiled brat. Anchoring too much energy in securing wealth may turn one into a paranoid. One may fall into bad friendships in seeking happiness. In short, the sources of happiness cannot guarantee the pleasure outcome. They can lead to misery if used in the wrong way. Thus there is a need for a certain measure among these sources of happiness so as to incite the pleasure we seek.

### **The Rhetoric and Dark Side of Consumerism**

Rhetoric is the art of persuasion using language in the form of writing or speaking. It can include the many forms of communication such as mass media to compel humans to do something. The rhetoric of consumerism is to pursue happiness through consumption. It targets our imagination and emotions in order to move us to seek happiness.<sup>19</sup> It fuels the desires and emotions rather than the intellect. According to Zygmunt Bauman, the members of the consumerist culture behave without thinking of their life's purpose and the right means of achieving it. The "consumer society promotes, encourages, or enforces a consumerist lifestyle and dislikes all alternative cultural options"<sup>20</sup> of happiness. It nurtures our dispositions, even at the subconscious level, to consume and to quest for worldly happiness that is found through the consumption of goods and services. Bauman added, the members are expected to follow the rules of consuming, its practical intents and purposes.<sup>21</sup>

Pope Benedict XVI said that the persuasive factor of consumerism is on easy and fast access to happiness. It is apparently not practical to choose the difficult path of self-development and transcendence if one can easily find pleasure in the consumer market. The consumer world considers happiness as a commodity where one can have easy access and be freed from all cares.<sup>22</sup> Such is a very powerful seduction of

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<sup>19</sup>Daniel Hayborn, *Happiness*, 10-11.

<sup>20</sup>Zygmunt Bauman, *Consuming Life*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007, 55.

<sup>21</sup>Zygmunt Bauman, *Consuming Life*, 55.

<sup>22</sup>Seewald, Peter and Ratzinger, Cardinal Joseph, *God and the World: Believing and Living in Our Time*, Ignatius Press. Kindle Edition, 53.

consumerism particularly for those who do not want discipline, sacrifice, and moderation in pursuing happiness. The branded lifestyles of the consumer world are also a strong temptation to those who live a consecrated life.

Consumer society is rhetorical.<sup>23</sup> There are eloquent teams who persuade or compel individuals to join in their shared consumptions, sentiments, and beliefs of a good life. Such groups have a branded style of living. The branded-living of these consumers searches and derives their notion of happiness in the propaganda of the global market. They persuade others to follow their branded style of living. These branded styles of consuming are appealing which thus can easily dispose consumers to follow the rules and styles.

The dark side of consumerism is the commoditization of the consumer. According to Bauman, the decisive purpose of a consumerist city is not the satisfaction of needs and desires of the individual but the commoditization of the consumer. Consumerist society shapes or reshapes the status of the consumer into a saleable commodity. Thus, the citizens of the consumer society are consumer commodities.<sup>24</sup> The focus therefore is not to make us better humans but excellent commodities.

Clavier asserts that Augustine's view on the devil's temptation and the rhetoric of consumerism are similar. Like the devil's classic seduction, the goal of consumerism is to take us captives. For Augustine, the devil's technique involves three stages; to *seduce*, to *delight*, and to *engage*. Satan persuades sinners to consent to his diabolical suggestions through *delight*. Once they consent to the suggestion and experience sin's delight, they long to relive the experience repeatedly, even though they can never manage it. The devil binds sinners to himself through *seduction* rather than coercion – and this seduction manifests itself in a form of rhetoric that draws people towards their own destruction.<sup>25</sup> Likewise, consumerism aggressively allures us to engage in the delight

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<sup>23</sup>Mark Clavier, *Reading Augustine: On Consumer Culture, Identity, the Church and the Rhetorics of Delight*, Bloomsbury Publishing: Kindle Edition, 12. For more detailed information on the rhetoric of consumerism as a society read, Zygmunt Bauman, *Consuming Life*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007, chapter 2, "Society of Consumers."

<sup>24</sup>Zygmunt Bauman, *Consuming Life*, 59.

<sup>25</sup>Mark Clavier, *Reading Augustine: On Consumer Culture, Identity, the Church and the Rhetorics of Delight*, 48-49.

of buying things. After a joyful experience of purchasing a commodity, the consumer will shift his or her focus and be seduced to buy another one. The immediate cycle of gratification will turn the consumer into a slave buyer, compulsive buyer, or captured consumer.

Based on study on the relationship of consumption and happiness, the consumption of material goods affects the degree of happiness of consumers. In the study, spending on food, durables, clothing, alcohol, leisure, and health, increases one's happiness.<sup>26</sup> Thus spending means greater happiness.<sup>27</sup> Consumers are constantly seduced to repeat the fleeting delight of consuming until they become full blooded consumer citizens. Some are addicted to buying, that is they become shopaholics. Others are hooked to TV, internet, and social media being unaware of the time wasted away.

The rhetoric of consumerism is to find salvation, happiness and fulfillment not in God but in the present world we live in. It cultivates our heart to desire what is undesirable and to engage in pursuing happiness in material possessions.

## **The Impact of Consumerism**

Pope Francis addressed the faithful to act soberly in society so often intoxicated by consumerism and hedonism. That is, to be simple, balanced, consistent, capable of seeing and doing what is essential.<sup>28</sup> According to Rajan Zed, despite beliefs and preaching of the superiority of religious traditions concerning happy life, "consumerism is spreading, engulfing both rich and poor and cutting across religions."<sup>29</sup> The homily of Pope Francis denotes the dominance of the consumer city despite the call to the higher spiritual pursuits. People are immersed in consumer marketing strategies that orient people to pursue materialistic desires.

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<sup>26</sup>See <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2158244020986239>/accessed/23.7.21.

<sup>27</sup>[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/277004500\\_Consumption\\_and\\_Happiness](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/277004500_Consumption_and_Happiness)/accessed/23.7.21.

<sup>28</sup>[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2015/documents/papa-francesco\\_20151224\\_omelia-natale.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20151224_omelia-natale.html)

<sup>29</sup><https://www.rgj.com/story/opinion/columnists/2016/01/07/faith-forum-does-consumerism-take-us-away-god/78436800/>

The frivolous engagement in the marketing style of the consumer would result in the marginalization of God. Many believe that consumerism takes us away from God<sup>30</sup> and replaces religious beliefs, aspirations, and paths of happiness with the instant pleasure of consuming goods. Rittenhouse noted St. John Paul II's assertion that consumerism can prevent the consumer-devoted member to attain his or her true goal as human being.<sup>31</sup> Some would abandon traditional paths to happy life since the pleasure of consuming is rather more easy and appealing than traditional religious paths to happiness. Some would find the consumerist life and accumulation of goods more interesting than the vow of poverty and sharing of common goods. Consumer city has infiltrated the portals of religious houses. Many consecrated persons seek gratification in consuming and accumulating goods. For St. John Paul II consumerism is closely linked to materialism and hedonism. Consumerism has negative impact, such as fragmentation, not only on consecrated persons but also on family and friendships, whenever the materialistic and hedonistic orientation prevails in the heart of the person. There is likely a permanent conflict in a family if one or more members of the family or friends have a materialistic value orientation.<sup>32</sup> Consumerism radically changes the religious outlook in one's quest for a happy life.

Consumers become shopaholics with a heart oriented towards a radical dissatisfaction. The logic of consumerism creates an endless and restless pursuit of materialistic desires. Once the desired object is attained, the attention is directed towards another desirable commodity. It is a repeated cycle of buying and desiring anew, the result of which are: unnecessary consumption of commodities and a cluttered and anxious life. Compulsive buying fills one's closet with lots of stuff and things, some of which are not even used. According to Bruce Rittenhouse, the unnecessary consumption is the outcome of the manipulation of

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<sup>30</sup><https://www.rgj.com/story/opinion/columnists/2016/01/07/faith-forum-does-consumerism-take-us-away-god/78436800/>

<sup>31</sup>Bruce P. Rittenhouse, *Shopping for Meaningful Lives : The Religious Motive of Consumerism*. Eugene, Or: Cascade Books, 2013. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e093mww&AN=612522&site=ehost-live>.

<sup>32</sup>Bruce P. Rittenhouse. 2013. *Shopping for Meaningful Lives : The Religious Motive of Consumerism*. Eugene, Or: Cascade Books. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e093mww&AN=612522&site=ehost-live>.

consumers employed by economic producers through marketing and advertising.<sup>33</sup>

Consumerism does not have an ultimate goal such as eternal happiness. It only caters to providing the “here and now” fleeting happiness. Thus it leads the consumer to what Pope Francis calls moral deficiency or fragmentation.<sup>34</sup> Bruce Rittenhouse agreed and added that consumerism morally deforms lives of individuals and society that can result in negative consequences to the society and the environment. Rittenhouse added that the commitment to a consuming way of life may result in physical and mental sickness. Those who fix their attention on the acquisition of possessions, popularity, and good looks are more vulnerable to headaches, sore muscles, backaches, sore throats and psychological disorders such as narcissistic personality disorder, depression and so on.<sup>35</sup> The devotion to consuming life can also undermine spiritual wellbeing due to one’s materialistic value orientation.<sup>36</sup>

Consumerism turns consumers into commodity.<sup>37</sup> The life and soul of the consumer are offered for sale. Think of those who opt to become a sex worker just to make ends meet. Think of those who owe huge debts. Their time and energies are spent no longer at their own leisure. Some will be forced to do immoral means in order to pay their debts ending up with a miserable life.

### The Augustinian Option on Happy Life

Augustine did not have an iPad, tablet, laptop, OLED television, car, internet, Netflix, but he was happy in communion with his fellow servants of God. One of Augustine’s sources of happiness is contemplation of the scriptures. He wanted to devote his time in contemplation of the word of God beginning from *Cassiciacum* up to

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<sup>33</sup>Bruce P. Rittenhouse, *Shopping for Meaningful Lives*, <https://search.ebsco-host.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e093mww&AN=612522&site=ehost-live>.

<sup>34</sup><https://www.rgj.com/story/opinion/columnists/2016/01/07/faith-forum-does-consumerism-take-us-away-god/78436800/>

<sup>35</sup>Bruce P. Rittenhouse, *Shopping for Meaningful Lives*, <https://search.ebsco-host.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e093mww&AN=612522&site=ehost-live>.

<sup>36</sup>Bruce P. Rittenhouse. *Shopping for Meaningful Lives*.

<sup>37</sup>Zygmunt Bauman, *Consuming Life*, 59.

his retirement as bishop. He even requested ten days to be alone on his deathbed so as to devote quality time contemplating the penitential Psalms.<sup>38</sup>

Augustine's quest for happiness was indicated by a series of renunciations. He renounced prospect wealth, honor, pleasures of the table, marriage, emperor's friendship, career, and other mundane plans for the sake of happiness.<sup>39</sup> Some highlights of his sources of happiness were life of poverty, imitation of Christ, humility, common life, life of virginity and continence, obedience, and contemplation.

Augustine's search for truth was motivated by his desire for happiness.<sup>40</sup> The main theme of *De Beata Vita*, *Confessions*, *City of God*, and other writings, revolves around Augustine's desire for a blessed life.<sup>41</sup>

The desire for happiness is engraved in the human heart.<sup>42</sup> Such desire comes from God so that humans will be able to trace their way back to God. We wish for complete happiness but seek it beyond material things. Augustine even said that Christ, who came from the realm of happiness, did not find happiness on earth.<sup>43</sup> Thus perfect happiness does not exist on earth but can only be found in heaven.<sup>44</sup> It is God who can satisfy our desire for complete happiness.<sup>45</sup>

Augustine's notion of happiness goes beyond the feelings of positive moods and emotions. It refers to the overall status of one's life. Augustine's *Beatus* can be translated as blessed or happy.<sup>46</sup> His

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<sup>38</sup>Possidius, Bishop of Calama. *The Life of St. Augustine*. Translated by Cardinal Michelle Pelegrino, Villanova: Augustinian Press, 1988. Chapter 31.

<sup>39</sup>Cf. Adolar Zumkeller, O.S.A., *Augustine's Ideal of Religious Life*, trans Edmund Colledge, O.S.A., New York: Fordham University Press, 1986, 3-16.

<sup>40</sup>Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Augustine*, Trans. L.E.M. Lynch, NY: Vintage Books, 1967, 5.

<sup>41</sup>Caleb Cohoe, "What Does the Happy Life Require? Augustine on What the Summum Bonum Includes," Oxford Studies in Medieval Philosophy Volume 8, October 2020. see <https://philarchive.org/archive/COHWDT>; Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Augustine*, 3-10;

<sup>42</sup>Cf. *De Beata Vita* 10; *De Civitate Dei* 10.1; *De Trinitate* 13.7; 13.20, 25

<sup>43</sup>Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, a New Edition. Berkely, CA: University of California Press, 2000, 242.

<sup>44</sup>John Peter Kenney, *Contemplation and Classical Christianity: A Study in Augustine*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, Kindle Edition, 96.

<sup>45</sup>Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Augustine*, 4.

<sup>46</sup>Augustine, *On the Happy Life: St. Augustine's Cassiciacum Dialogue*, 16.

concept of *Beatus* is founded on the biblical tradition of blessedness.<sup>47</sup> In *De Beata Vita*, happiness is having God.<sup>48</sup> Happy life refers to the enjoyment of God. Life of happiness (*vita beata*) of the early Augustine consists of the contemplation and attainment of the truth, goodness, and beauty.<sup>49</sup> It is to be found in loving that will make us blessed. It is in loving Christ that we are blessed and conformed to God and not to the world.<sup>50</sup> Thus the attainment of happiness is to cling to God in affection, desire and love.<sup>51</sup>

Adolar Zumkeller thought that the peak of Augustine's happiness was the time of his retirement at *Cassiciacum*. He enjoyed weeks of philosophical contemplation with his son, mother, cousins and friends.<sup>52</sup> In fact he wrote his book "*On The Happy Life*" on the occasion of his 32<sup>nd</sup> birthday (November 13, 386) with them.<sup>53</sup>

Augustine's benchmarking with regard to ascetic life and his *Otium* at *Cassiacum* helped him develop the ideals of monastic life as a way to heavenly or blessed life. Augustine's program of life lived and taught in the three monasteries<sup>54</sup> can be assumed as realization of heavenly life.

For him, monastic life is witnessing making known the life of angels and the ways of heaven. The contemplative life of the monks makes heavenly life tangible.<sup>55</sup> According to Possidius, Augustine mirrored Mary's attitude sitting at the feet of Jesus. For Augustine, Mary happily feeding on the words of Jesus is a demonstration of a peaceful and blessed life in heaven.<sup>56</sup> Contemplative life as portrayed

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<sup>47</sup>Augustine, *On the Happy Life: St. Augustine's Cassiciacum Dialogue*, 5.

<sup>48</sup>Augustine, *On the Happy Life: St. Augustine's Cassiciacum Dialogues*, translated by Michael Foley, London: Yale University Press, 2019, 1.11

<sup>49</sup>Carol Harrison, *Rethinking Augustine's Early Theology: An Argument of Continuity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006, 102; Adolar Zumkeller, O.S.A., *Augustine's Ideal of Religious Life*, trans Edmund Colledge, O.S.A., New York: Fordham University Press, 1986, 8.

<sup>50</sup>Carol Harrison, *Rethinking Augustine's Early Theology*, 113.

<sup>51</sup>Carol Harrison, *Rethinking Augustine's Early Theology*, 102.

<sup>52</sup>Adolar Zumkeller, O.S.A., *Augustine's Ideal of Religious Life*, 9.

<sup>53</sup>Augustine, *On the Happy Life: St. Augustine's Cassiciacum Dialogues*, 63.

<sup>54</sup>The three monasteries founded by Augustine were: The first monastery was the Tagaste Monastery, the Garden Monastery at Hippo and the Cleric's Monastery in the Bishop's house.

<sup>55</sup>Adolar Zumkeller, O.S.A., *Augustine's Ideal of Religious Life*, 123.

<sup>56</sup>Possidius, *The Life of St. Augustine*. Chapter 24; Adolar Zumkeller, O.S.A., *Augustine's Ideal of Religious Life*, 123.

by Mary is a foretaste of heavenly life. Like Mary at the feet of Jesus, Augustine was filled with longing for a happy life. He never got tired searching for it through the contemplation of the divine Truth and Beauty.<sup>57</sup> Thus, the entrance to the Augustinian monastery and the practice of contemplation is an exercise of the attainment of blessed life. In the monasteries of Augustine, one has the opportunity to experience ideal happiness that will fuel one's heart to long for a more lasting experience of heavenly life.

### **Hundred years after the Great Union**

After a hundred years of the Great Union in 1256, there were abuses in the Augustinian Order. According to David Gutierrez, OSA, there was a decline in discipline in all the provinces of the Augustinian Order. Around 1357, there were zealous friars of the Order who wanted to revive the ideals taught and lived by St. Augustine. The advocates of the reform desired to restore the Augustinian religious life in all its aspects: worship, observance of the cloister, a greater asceticism or austerity, common life, and individual poverty.<sup>58</sup>

The highlights of the founding inspiration of the *observantines* were likewise asserted by Pietro Bellini: common life and enclosure, austerity of life, prayer and meditation, and studies.<sup>59</sup> Exemplary friars who took part in the renewal of the Order wanted to return to the faithful observance of the Rule of St. Augustine. They wanted to revive the fervor of imitating and following Christ in the Augustinian fashion. They wanted to re-establish common life with the abolition of private property, as indicated in the Rule, "to call nothing your own." They chose to live in equality in matters of food and clothing. The reformed friars had the duties to take part in all the activities of common life

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<sup>57</sup>Adolar Zumkeller, O.S.A., *Augustine's Ideal of Religious Life*, 123.

<sup>58</sup>David Gutierrez, O.S.A., *The Augustinians in the Middle Ages 1357-1517*, translated by Thomas Martin, Villanova, Pennsylvania: Augustinian Historical Institute, Villanova University, 1983, 73-98; See also, Angel Matinez Cuesta, O.A.R., *The Order of Augustinian Recollects: Its Charismatic Evolution*, The Order of Augustinian Recollects, Manila, Philippines, 1994, 25-27.

<sup>59</sup>Pietro Bellini, OSA., *The Observantine Movements, in Augustinian Spirituality and the Charism of the Augustinians*, edited by John Rotelle, OSA, Villanova, PA: Augustinian Press, 1995, 110-113.



especially in prayers and meals. There should be no privileges for those holding office or those with academic degrees. In some parts of the Order in Italy, Ireland, and Castille, there was a desire to revive hermitages, limit the apostolate giving little importance to academic formation.<sup>60</sup> The practice of austerity took shape in the form of the life of poverty, that is, sharing of possessions, not having any private property, and practicing rigorous asceticism through the observance of fasting and abstinence, silence, and voluntary ascetical disciplines such as self-flagellation. Special emphasis was given to forms of divine worship: daily conventual mass, choral prayer with chanting of the divine office, devotion to Mary, recollection, longer hours of community meditation and the “*silentium magnum*.”<sup>61</sup>

In Spain, the reform movement started in 1412. Benedict XIII gave permission to the Augustinians to erect a house of observance in Fraga. The spirit of the reform near the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century was intensified due to the support of the Catholic monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabel.<sup>62</sup> On December 5, 1588, with the support of King Philip II, in the Province of Castille, the birth of the Recollection was realized. Like the exemplary religious of the observantine congregations, the founding fathers of the Recollects desired a greater perfection, a return to the monastic ideal of St. Augustine,<sup>63</sup> and more austere form of life.<sup>64</sup> The Recollects assimilated the founding inspirations embodied by the various observantine congregations. Angel Martinez Cuesta, OAR, said that they aspired to a life of real poverty, prayer, silence, austerity, and equality.<sup>65</sup>

The Augustinian Recollects, in the spirit of the reform movements within the Augustinian Order, desired to restore the monastic ideals of St. Augustine and his Rule for the sake of blessed life. The “*Forma de*

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<sup>60</sup>Pietro Bellini, OSA., *The Observantine Movements*, 111.

<sup>61</sup>Pietro Bellini, OSA., *The Observantine Movements*, 111-112.

<sup>62</sup>David Gutierrez, O.S.A., *The Augustinians in the Middle Ages 1357-1517*, 86-88.

<sup>63</sup>Angel Matinez Cuesta, O.A.R., *The Augustinian Recollect Charism*, The Order of Augustinian Recollects, Manila, Philippines, 1994.

<sup>64</sup>Angel Matinez Cuesta, O.A.R., *The Order of Augustinian Recollects: Its Charismatic Evolution*, 29-30.

<sup>65</sup>Angel Matinez Cuesta, O.A.R., *The Order of Augustinian Recollects: Its Charismatic Evolution*, 30.

*Vivir*” (Way of Life) 1589, highlighted the importance of divine worship, the value of peace and harmony, austerity, silence, life of poverty, and some forms of ascetical discipline in the pursuit of blessed life.<sup>66</sup> The OAR constitutions stated that the origin and purpose of the Order stems from the collective charism of the first Recollects. They aspired to live with ardent fervor the type of consecrated life established by St. Augustine and his Rule.<sup>67</sup> The formula of the OAR religious profession accentuated the commitment to follow the purpose and Rule of St. Augustine. Therefore, the Recollect movement of 1588 has an indispensable element of Augustinianness due to the commitment to follow St. Augustine, his teachings, his life, and his Rule.<sup>68</sup> Recollect and Augustinianness are two aspects essentially intertwined. They are intimately connected that the one cannot be had without the other. In short, we cease to be Recollects without the Augustinianness. We cannot be called authentic Augustinian Recollects without the commitment to follow St. Augustine as model of our life and teacher of doctrines.

The Recollect revival of the original purpose of the Rule and monastic ideals of St. Augustine is therefore a Recollect Augustinianness. It is a sure way to a blessed life. The Holy Spirit’s rhetoric reactivated the type of consecrated life lived and taught by St. Augustine, fidelity to the Rule of Augustine and the Constitutions of the O.A.R as necessary conditions in the pursuit of a happy life.

### **Recollect Augustinianness against the Rhetoric of Consumerism**

The Recollect Augustinianness of 1588 is a response to the divine rhetoric which was carried out by the observantine congregations within the O.S.A. It gives us essential avenues for the pursuit of happiness which can still be valid in today’s culture. In fact, Hayborn observed that the pursuit of happiness in today’s culture is inefficient, destructive, and often self-defeating.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>See, Angel Matinez Cuesta, O.A.R., *The Augustinian Recollect Charism*, 24.

<sup>67</sup>See, *OAR Constitutions*, Chapter 1, Art 1. 3-6.

<sup>68</sup>Cf. Balbino Rano, OSA., *Saint Augustine and the First Augustinians*, in *Augustinian Spirituality and the Charism of the Augustinians*, edited by John Rotelle, OSA, Villanova, PA: Augustinian Press, 1995, 103.

<sup>69</sup>Daniel Hayborn, *Happiness: A Very Short Introduction*, 13.

Augustine asserted that the attainment of true happiness without dispute can only be found in God and cannot be experienced on this earth.<sup>70</sup> Thus the obvious challenge of Augustine against consumerism is the impossibility of constant earthly happiness. Instead of fueling desire to consume products, Recollect Augustinianness would rather choose to heal and redirect one's desire for God. Instead of inflaming the desire for consumer products and upgrading one's status to high standard of living, Augustine advised to need less rather than to have more. Life of poverty and humility are sure sources and avenues to a happy life. You do not need to acquire lots of money to be happy. The best things in life are free. Sharing of goods in common is a superior source of happiness rather than anchoring one's happiness in material security. It is better to imitate Christ and build one's identity in Him, rather than become a "commodity" of the consumer city. In general, the Recollect Augustinianness' challenge against consumerism is to anchor our quest for happiness in Christ, the source, the way, the truth, and the model of happiness. Happy life must be pursued in following and imitating Christ.

The imitation of Christ the poor, is a way of happiness for the sons of Augustine. The 16<sup>th</sup> century Recollect Friars lived the life of poverty as a way to a blessed life and not as a source of misery. They chose to live in personal and communal poverty. Instead of the acquisition of goods, they opted to live in poverty by means of sharing goods. From Augustine's experience, the acquisition of material possessions in community life promote division, individualism, avarice, envy, jealousy, selfishness, competition, and quarrels.<sup>71</sup> Augustine's assertion was proven in the study of Kasser. Those persons with materialistic values are likely to engage in anti-social acts and tend to control and manipulate. They are inclined to compete rather than collaborate in the community.<sup>72</sup> Hayborn sees that one's anchoring to material security enkindles the appetites to need more and thus make us vulnerable to

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<sup>70</sup>Kennedy, John Peter. *Contemplation and Classical Christianity: A Study in Augustine*, (Oxford Early Christian Studies) (Page 96). OUP Oxford. Kindle Edition.

<sup>71</sup>Theodore Tack, OSA, *An Augustinian Appreciation of the Religious Vows*, Berdon, Eusebio, et al. *Elements of an Augustinian Formation*, Roma: Pubblicazioni Agostiniane Curia Generalizia, 2001, 194.

<sup>72</sup>Bruce P. Rittenhouse. 2013. *Shopping for Meaningful Lives : The Religious Motive of Consumerism*. Eugene, Or: Cascade Books. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e093mww&AN=612522&site=ehost-live>.

disappointment, frustrations, and anxiety.<sup>73</sup> Thus the vow of poverty is a better option and valid source of happiness since the acquisition of products can never provide lasting happiness. Even if one is a billionaire who seems to have everything one cannot still be considered happy. Augustine cites the case of the billionaire Orata in the *De Beata Vita* 4.27. He was extremely rich but not considered happy since he feared losing his wealth. He was still lacking wisdom and spiritual goods.<sup>74</sup> Being a billionaire does not mean one is happy since one needs to sustain and contain one's wealth. Thus, to ground one's happiness on wealth is like building a happy life on sand. For these reasons, the renunciation of private property in the monastery is a prerequisite to a life of blessedness.

Poverty as sharing of common goods includes the sharing of ideals, ideas, values, and most especially faith. If consumerism leads to the "desire for the individual gratification rather than fruitful and shared life"<sup>75</sup>, Augustine recommends, community sharing of material and spiritual goods which stems from love leads to unity and harmony and to the reception of God Himself as the common inheritance.<sup>76</sup> Augustine said, he who is happy has God. The logic of sharing the common goods is the building of the identity as followers of Christ the poor who emptied Himself for our salvation. It is a form of discipleship which is directed towards the formation of our being. Common life is not compatible with consumerism since its direction is towards "having", that is, the desire to have more in order to enjoy the commodities as an end in itself.<sup>77</sup> In other words, consumerism's direction is towards the gratification of the individual while common life is directed towards God who will reward the community with the joy of His presence.

Likewise, the life of poverty is a witnessing to the people of God. The life of simplicity and sharing are very powerful tools for proclaiming blessedness in the consumer city. Miguel Angel Keller

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<sup>73</sup>Daniel Hayborn, *Happiness: A Very Short Introduction*, 57.

<sup>74</sup>Augustine, *On the Happy Life: St. Augustine's Cassiciacum Dialogue*, 43, 98.

<sup>75</sup>Bruce P. Rittenhouse, *Shopping for Meaningful Lives*, <https://search.ebsco-host.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e093mww&AN=612522&site=ehost-live>.

<sup>76</sup>Theodore Tack, OSA, *An Augustinian Appreciation of the Religious Vows*, 195.

<sup>77</sup>Bruce P. Rittenhouse. *Shopping for Meaningful Lives* : <https://search.ebsco-host.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e093mww&AN=612522&site=ehost-live>.

asserted that the sharing of common goods in solidarity with the church especially the poor is a powerful way of giving witness of the Gospel.<sup>78</sup> Augustinian monastic poverty as lived by the 16<sup>th</sup> century exemplary Recollect friars proved to us that having little in life can be an avenue to a rich and fulfilling life up to the point of receiving God Himself.

Augustine's best experience in the pursuit of happiness is contemplation. St. Possidius saw Augustine's joy in such a pursuit as similar to the joy of Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus. Augustine cleaved to contemplation even on his deathbed. He firmly believed that through contemplation of the truth, goodness, and divine beauty, heavenly life could be introduced to our earthly life.<sup>79</sup> The pioneer Augustinian Recollects followed Augustine's contemplation as a main road to perfection and happy life. Cuesta asserted that the *Forma de Vivir* accentuated the contemplative aspect.<sup>80</sup>

The OAR Constitution 6 affirms the Augustinian monastic perfection and the *Forma de Vivir* as way to a blessed life. It defined the divine rhetoric of 1588, that perfect life can be realized via revival of the monastic ideals of Augustine coupled with the *Forma de Vivir*, namely: living in community as brothers; discipleship and conformity to Christ; the quest for truth and service to the Church<sup>81</sup>; perfection of charity according to the charism of Augustine and the spirit of the *Forma de Vivir*. Thus, the assimilation of these monastic ways of living is a spiritual exercise toward heavenly life.

Hayborn said that the right relationship is a source of happiness. Close relationships with friends, family, and community animated by mutual understanding, respect, concern, validation of the other as worthwhile, and trust promote happiness.<sup>82</sup> However, for Augustine, living in common as brothers is better than anchoring one's quest for happiness in relationships rooted in benevolence of natural order. Relationships in community must transcend such natural order. It must be rooted in God. Living in community as brothers directly journeying

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<sup>78</sup>Cf. OAR Cons., 57; Miguel Angel Keller, OSA, *Human Formation and Augustinian Anthropology*, Berdon, Eusebio, et al. *Elements of an Augustinian Formation*, Roma: Pubblicazioni Agostiniane Curia Generalizia, 2001, 223.

<sup>79</sup>Cf. Adolar Zumkeller, O.S.A., *Augustine's Ideal of Religious Life*, 123.

<sup>80</sup>Angel Matinez Cuesta, O.A.R., *The Augustinian Recollect Charism*, 24.

<sup>81</sup>See OAR Cons., 27.

<sup>82</sup>Daniel Hayborn, *Happiness: A Very Short Introduction*, 68.

towards God is another source of happiness for Augustine. In fact, he confessed that he would seek consolation with the brothers in the monastery whenever burdened and weary with the troubles of the world. He said; “I feel that God is dwelling there (community), God in whom I find safe refuge, in whom I take secure repose.”<sup>83</sup> Augustine finds happiness in a community of love centered in following and imitating Christ. Such a community surpasses the joy marketed by the consumer city.<sup>84</sup> Likewise, one would find a happy life by offering oneself to a community of one mind and heart intent toward God. The access to blessed life would be to cleave and to strive to be a faithful member of the family of God or community of brothers animating Christ’s love.

## Conclusion

The rhetoric of consumerism is devilish. It seduces consumers to pursue happiness on a destructive path. Consumerism’s promise of happiness is a kind of deception since true lasting happiness cannot be experienced on earth. It has a negative impact on the moral, social, physical, and spiritual well-being of an individual. The dark side of the consumer city is the commoditization of the consumer. It turns the consumer into a saleable item rather than an image of God.

The Recollect Augustinianness provides efficient, realistic, and constructive avenues in the pursuit of happiness. The life of poverty and humility, restoration of the monastic ideals and Rule of Augustine, contemplation, imitation and following of Christ, common life, service to the Church, perfection of charity according to the charism of Augustine and the spirit of the *Forma de Vivir* were proven, tested, and superior sources of happiness. They were products of exemplary friars who faithfully responded to the divine rhetoric which began around 1357.

The rhetoric of consumerism targets our emotions and imaginations. It is important for us to have knowledge of the harms and threats engendered by consumerism. We now have the knowledge of the dark side of consumerism and the superiority of the Recollect Augustinianness. It is now time to have a closer look at the beauty of the Augustinian Recollect way of life in our quest for happiness.

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<sup>83</sup>Adolar Zumkeller, O.S.A., *Augustine’s Ideal of Religious Life*, 126.

<sup>84</sup>Cf. Adolar Zumkeller, O.S.A., *Augustine’s Ideal of Religious Life*, 126.



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