

# Tending This Fragile Earth, Our Island Home: The Pope's Encyclical in Dialogue with Anglican Theology

JOHN L. KATER\*

*Laudato si', Pope Francis's 2015 encyclical on the environment, drew on the Roman Catholic magisterium and his own background as a Latin American Jesuit influenced by Franciscan spirituality. He described a planetary ecological crisis and spells out a response based on a theology and spirituality of creation and invites dialogue with voices from other traditions. The Anglican theological tradition offers resources for dialogue with the encyclical, including nineteenth- and twentieth-century theologians, as well as insights from the liturgical movement, and the dialogue with science that issued in the Episcopal Church's "A Catechism of Creation." Flexibility in liturgical experimentation, affirmation of the role of laypeople in decision making, and Anglican openness to examining faith and practice in the light of new understandings and insights are all resources that the Anglican tradition can bring to a conversation with the concerns of Laudato si'.*

On May 24, 2015, Jorge Mario Bergoglio, Pope Francis I, issued an encyclical entitled *Laudato si'*. It was not his first encyclical, but of all his publications, it has attracted by far the most attention beyond the orbit of the Roman Catholic Church.

Its impact on Christians beyond Francis's own church is not surprising. Perhaps part of its appeal lies in the fact that the pope, although a Jesuit, opted in his encyclical for a perspective more clearly identified with St. Francis of Assisi—a perspective anticipated by his

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\* John L. Kater is Professor Emeritus of Ministry Development at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific, Berkeley, California. From 1984 to 1990 he served as education officer for the Episcopal Diocese of Panama and priest-in-charge of Iglesia San Francisco de Asís in Panama City. He currently teaches at Ming Hua Theological College in Hong Kong.

choice of a name at the time of his election to the papacy. Francis of Assisi may well be among the most popular of Roman Catholic saints in the wider ecumenical context.

But part of the encyclical's appeal may also lie in the remarkable ecumenical appeal of its author. At a time when institutions in general are widely criticized as dysfunctional at best and oppressive at worst, Pope Francis has demonstrated an affect shaped far more by his own personality and character than by the institution he heads.

The Jesuit and Franciscan impulses of Francis's ministry are mediated through his own personal experience as an Argentinean of Italian heritage whose career developed against the backdrop of the authoritarian regimes in power until 1983, and the theology of liberation that emerged as a product of profound theological reflection following the Second Vatican Council. The church Francis served was divided between those who saw it as a bastion of social order and those who argued for a "church of the poor." And while the realities of poverty and dictatorship assumed primary importance for much of Francis's adult life, sexual morality as it applies to gay and lesbian people, the appropriate role of women in the church, and the worldwide scandal of child sexual abuse also demanded his attention. Furthermore, Francis served a church that experienced a steady erosion of its influence as Argentine society became increasingly secularized.

Each of those aspects of Francis's own history and context is evident in the text of *Laudato si'*, especially in its strong pastoral dimension, its emphasis on the impact of social ills on the most vulnerable, and in its realization that the church's voice is only one of many heard in the public square (and by no means always the strongest). But the focus of the encyclical is the care of the earth, "our common home," described by St. Francis as "a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us," but who now "cries out to us because of what we have inflicted on her." (1, 2)<sup>1</sup> The encyclical thus places the authority of the papacy on the side of those scientists, politicians, social scientists, politicians—and theologians—who warn of potential catastrophe from human mistreatment of the natural world. In joining his voice to such a diverse chorus, the pope challenges his hearers to consider the crisis

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<sup>1</sup> Numbers within parentheses refer to the paragraphs of the English text of *Laudato si'*. The text from which they are taken is *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si' of the Holy Father Francis on Care of Our Common Home* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015).

from a particular perspective but relevant, he claims, “to all people of good will” (62). His perspective, he argues, adds a particular dimension—a transcendent dimension grounded in the reality of God—to the conversation, and provides a spiritual/theological underpinning to efforts to heal the broken creation. In his introduction, Francis invites those with other perspectives to enter into a creative dialogue with him. This article responds to that invitation from the point of view of Anglican faith and practice, seeking common ground, and indicating where a perspective shaped by Anglican sensibilities might strengthen, challenge, and complement his assumptions.

### *The World according to Laudato Si'*

Francis's perspective is enlightened by scripture and the magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church, but Francis of Assisi is the pope's primary advocate of “an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically” (10). Francis affirms the church's traditional belief, articulated especially by Thomas Aquinas, that alongside scripture the creation must be understood as another source of revelation about the nature of things. But with Francis of Assisi he also affirms that all revelation of God's being should evoke a response of “gladness and praise” (12).

The body of *Laudato si'* begins with a chapter describing the symptoms of humankind's damage to creation: pollution linked to a “throwaway culture,” climate change, the depletion of water and other natural resources, and the loss of biodiversity. But Francis also adds a generalized decline in the quality of human life, social fragmentation, and a global experience of inequality. He recognizes that the church has no unique expertise for concrete solutions to the crisis, but shares the realization that “our common home is falling into disrepair” (61). The balance of the encyclical will offer his analysis of why this has happened, as well as insights into how the work of restoring the creation to health can be undertaken. Christian theology does not stand apart from the knowledge gained from the natural sciences; all knowledge is from God, whatever its source.

### *Enter Theology*

The second chapter of *Laudato si'* moves directly to an affirmation of a theological perspective, which the pope entitles “The Gospel of Creation.” “If we are concerned to develop an ecology capable of

remedying the damage we have done, no branch of the sciences and no form of wisdom can be left out, and that includes religion and the language particular to it” (63). Quoting John Paul II, he insists that “responsibility within creation, and their duty towards nature and the Creator, are an essential part of [Christians’] faith” (64).

Francis’s doctrine of creation is rooted solidly in the Hebrew scriptures. He cites the early chapters of Genesis to assert that human dignity is based on the goodness of God’s creation and the biblical teaching “that every man and woman is created out of love and made in God’s image and likeness” (65). And, he goes on, “human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbor and with the earth itself.” Sadly, sin has ruptured all three relationships (66).

In his dependence on and frequent citation of the scriptures, Francis has opted for a methodology similar to that encountered in the documents of the Second Vatican Council. While not ignoring or abandoning the church’s magisterium, those documents used scripture as their theological starting point. By choosing to anchor its declarations in scripture, Vatican II invited and encouraged dialogue with Christians of the Reformation traditions, for whom the scripture is always “the rule and ultimate standard of faith.”<sup>2</sup> By choosing a similar starting point, Francis makes the same appeal to the wider ecumenical community, inviting the kind of conversation this article seeks to establish.

Francis rejects the notion that human beings have been given “absolute domination” over the earth; rather, they are charged with “caring, protecting, overseeing, and preserving,” which in turn implies “a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature” (67). The body of biblical laws overseeing human behavior includes our relationship with all other living creatures, a relationship damaged by human sin.

Within the network of relationships that binds the creation together, Francis postulates a uniqueness to human beings that the theory of evolution does not negate: “Each of us is capable of entering into dialogue with others and with God himself. Our capacity to reason, to develop arguments, to be inventive, to interpret reality and to create art, along with other not yet disclosed capacities, are signs

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<sup>2</sup> “Lambeth Conference of 1888 Resolution 11,” *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1979), 877.

of a uniqueness which transcends the spheres of physics and biology." Francis believes that the novelty of a "personal being within a material universe" points to "a direct action of God" *and precludes taking any person as an object* (81, emphasis added). The earth is a "shared inheritance," the "patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone." The inevitable consequence, he affirms, is that "every ecological approach needs to incorporate a social perspective which takes into account the fundamental rights of the poor and underprivileged" (93, 95).

Underlying Francis's vision of human ecology is the traditional Christian concept of the "common good," based on an appropriate relationship between the individual and society. Inherent in the common good is a set of individual and social rights that protect each human being and the groups that define them, above all the family. This principle "becomes, logically and inevitably, a summons to solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters" (158). Francis's exegesis of a strain of Catholic Social Teaching since Augustine and Thomas Aquinas draws on the work of the Second Vatican Council and its further elucidation by advocates of the theology of liberation.

In its Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, entitled *Gaudium et Spes*, Vatican II had called for "vigorous efforts" to "remove as quickly as possible the immense economic inequalities which now exist," and which in many cases "are worsening."<sup>3</sup> Three years later, the Latin American Conference of [Roman Catholic] Bishops, meeting in Medellín, Colombia, took the impetus of the Vatican Council as its starting point and articulated a commitment to apply its principles to the particular circumstances of the continent.

The poverty of so many brothers cries out for justice, solidarity, open witness, commitment, strength, and exertion directed to the fulfillment of the redeeming mission to which it is committed by Christ. . . . The poverty of the church and of its members in Latin America ought to be a sign and a commitment—a sign of the inestimable value of the poor in

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<sup>3</sup> "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," para. 66, in Walter M. Abbott, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: The America Press, 1966), 274.

the eyes of God, an obligation of solidarity with those who suffer.<sup>4</sup>

This perspective, often summarized as a “preferential option for the poor,” is deeply shaped by a careful reading of the Jewish and Christian scriptures in contexts of widespread social and economic misery, and became a foundational element of the theology of liberation, developed by Gustavo Gutiérrez and many other Latin American theologians after 1970.

In choosing the vocabulary of liberation theology, Pope Francis expresses eagerness to relate his analysis of the environmental crisis to the work of Vatican II and a generation of theologians and pastors in his native Latin America, and an invitation to see ecological justice as a fundamental aspect of the church’s mission as defined by both the Vatican Council and its Latin American exegetes. He also expands the concern for the poor to include the rights of generations yet to come, whose future is compromised by the extravagance of an individualistic attachment to consumption.

### *What Went Wrong?*

Where are we to look for the origins of the ecological crisis? Francis invites us to discover its roots in a flawed understanding of human being, focused in what he calls the “dominant technological paradigm” (101). Contemporary technological advances are shaped by “the idea of infinite or unlimited growth . . . so attractive to economists, financiers and experts in technology.” This attitude, he observes, “rests on the lie that there is an infinite supply of the earthly goods” and results in the degradation of the planet. But that degradation is only one sign of a reductionism that ignores the fact that what seems natural and inevitable is in fact the result of choices about “the kind of society we want to build” (106, 107). Francis believes that the current technological paradigm posits humankind *over and against* nature, an attitude that inevitably devalues both nature and human life, and argues for “a new paradigm” that will “limit and direct technology” toward progress that is “healthier, more human, more social, more integral” (112).

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<sup>4</sup> “Poverty of the Church,” Latin American Bishops, September 6, 1968. [http://www.povertystudies.org/TeachingPages/EDS\\_PDFs4WEB/Medellin%20Document-%20Poverty%20of%20the%20Church.pdf](http://www.povertystudies.org/TeachingPages/EDS_PDFs4WEB/Medellin%20Document-%20Poverty%20of%20the%20Church.pdf).

Francis relates the technological paradigm to a prevalent relativism that makes the individual's own interests the center of each person's universe, objectifying others and fueling an appetite for consumption. He expresses serious concern over economic policies that encroach on the right of every human being to meaningful work, and commends efforts to support "small producers and differentiated production" over against "economies of scale," particularly in the agricultural sector, where small farming has been devastated in many parts of the world and contributed to rapid and unplanned urbanization with the problems that accompany it (128). "A technology severed from ethics," he observes, "will not easily be able to limit its own power" (136).

*Getting It Right: An Ecological Spirituality*

In place of the destructive paradigm he blames for the degradation of the planet, Francis proposes what he calls "integral ecology," which begins from the recognition that "everything is connected" (138). The environment, he affirms, should be understood as "a relationship existing between nature and the society which lives in it." Hence a solution requires "an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature" (139). Both economic and social policies directly affect the environment; so does culture, especially when influenced by the juggernaut of consumerism. Nowhere are its effects more visible than in the global process of urbanization, marked by poverty, instability, and violence. Inadequate housing and transport, overcrowding, insecurity, and lack of services are not, in Francis's view, simply unavoidable side effects of an inevitable process; they are the compounded fruits of multiple choices that violate human dignity.

Francis concludes his encyclical with a chapter entitled "Ecological Education and Spirituality." He insists that the seriousness of the crisis demands attention to how we are trained to *see* and to *act* as the stewards of the earth, which is our calling, particularly since many assume that there are no alternatives. The human freedom affirmed by the "techno-economic paradigm" is limited and distorted; for many, it is only the "freedom to consume," while real freedom is in the hands of "those who wield economic and financial power" (203). Consumerism is intimately related to a "collective selfishness" (204). Countering this faulty paradigm requires more than simply getting

our theology right; it calls for what the pope calls a “new lifestyle” to challenge the “utilitarian mindset” at the root of the planetary crisis (81). This lifestyle rests on an alternative spirituality that sees things as they really are and is sufficiently open to the transcendent dimension of reality to lead people to go beyond themselves. Laws can do little to effect change without a thoroughgoing conversion through an encounter with Christ that alters our relationship with the world around us—a conversion, he suggests, not unlike that of Francis of Assisi.

But beyond individual conversion to a spirituality of relationship and stewardship, society itself needs to be converted and transformed, to reflect God’s presence in the world and the order which is God’s will and purpose for the natural world. It is a spirituality that leads both people and institutions to tread lightly on the earth through a “responsible simplicity of life,” to understand that “less is more,” and to celebrate the peace that comes from living together. (222)

This is an essentially sacramental vision of the universe, and Francis looks to the witness of Eastern Christianity to emphasize that in the sacramental life of the church, creation itself is taken up into God in the water, bread, and wine of baptism and eucharist, and becomes the means of “mediating supernatural life” (235). In what is perhaps the most eloquent passage in the entire encyclical, he writes,

[Christ] comes not from above, but from within, he comes that we might find him in this world of ours. . . . Joined to the incarnate Son, present in the Eucharist, the whole cosmos gives thanks to God. Indeed, the Eucharist is itself an act of cosmic love. . . . The Eucharist joins heaven and earth; it embraces and penetrates all creation. The world which came forth from God’s hands returns to [God] in blessed and undivided adoration. (236)

At the end of his encyclical, this sacramental approach to the environment takes Francis back to theology, for the relationship between creatures in fact mirrors the relationship between the persons of the Trinity. Hence, “everything is interconnected, and this invites us to develop a spirituality of that global solidarity which follows from the mystery of the Trinity” (240).

Francis is confident that “at the end, we will find ourselves face to face with the infinite beauty of God. . . . Eternal life will be a shared experience of awe, in which each creature, resplendently transfigured, will take its rightful place and have something to give to those poor men and women who will have been liberated once and for all” (243). But that vision lies in the unknown future. Meanwhile, “we come together to take charge of this home which has been entrusted to us, knowing that all the good which exists here will be taken up into the heavenly feast. In union with all creatures, we journey through this land seeking God.” (244)

Francis fittingly ends his encyclical with prayer:

God of love, show us our place in this world as channels of your love for all the creatures of this earth, for not one of them is forgotten in your sight. Enlighten those who possess power and money that they may avoid the sin of indifference, that they may love the common good, advance the weak, and care for this world in which we live. The poor and the earth are crying out. O Lord, seize us with your power and light, help us to protect all life, to prepare for a better future, for the coming of your Kingdom of justice, peace, love and beauty.

To which the only appropriate response is surely “Amen!”

### *In Dialogue*

In expressing the hope “to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home” (3), Francis invites us to identify common ground, as well as those elements of his thought that other religious traditions, including the Anglican way, might amplify, question, or critique.

The Anglican theological tradition shares much with the theological basis of Francis’s thought in *Laudato si’*, perhaps in part because, far more than any other tradition of the Reformation, classical Anglican theology (following Richard Hooker) approached the doing of theology in categories inherited from Aquinas.

In the first book of his *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Hooker stresses that human survival depends on the ordered and harmonious functioning of God’s creation: “If the moon should wander from her beaten way the times and seasons of the year blend themselves by

disordered and confused mixture, the winds breathe out their last gasp, the clouds yield no rain, the earth be defeated of heavenly influence, the fruit of the earth pine away as children at the withered breasts of their mother no longer to yield them relief: what would become of man himself?”<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, Hooker reminds us that just as each element of the creation behaves in a way appropriate to its place in the natural order, “so likewise another law there is, . . . which bindeth them each to serve unto other’s good, and all to prefer the good of the whole before whatsoever their own particular; as we plainly see they do.”<sup>6</sup>

Human beings, Hooker asserts, have their own appropriate place in this God-given natural order; but alone among God’s creatures, they must exercise their will in freely choosing to conform to God’s harmonious order. That will depends on the gift of reason to identify appropriate behavior. At the same time, he warns that failing to conform oneself to God’s purposes risks violating and damaging the whole creation.

For we see the whole world and each part thereof so compacted, that as long as each thing performeth only that work which is natural unto it, it thereby preserveth both other things and also itself. Contrariwise, let any principal thing, as the sun, the moon, any one of the heavens or elements, but once cease or fail, or swerve, and who doth not easily conceive that the sequel thereof would be ruin both to itself and whatsoever dependeth on it?<sup>7</sup>

Like Pope Francis, Hooker understands the creation to reflect the being of God; but Hooker also sees the very existence of multiple created beings, each reflecting something of God, as implying that God also intends for them to live in harmony with each other. Hooker’s theology was a strongly public theology; the proper practice of Christian faith affected not only the life of the individual but of society itself.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, vol. 1, book I.3.2 (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1907, 1954), 156–157.

<sup>6</sup> Hooker, *Ecclesiastical Polity*, I. III., 161.

<sup>7</sup> Hooker, *Ecclesiastical Polity*, I. IX.1., 185.

<sup>8</sup> Rowan Williams, “The Richard Hooker Lecture—Richard Hooker (c1554–1600): The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity Revisited,” October 25, 2005. <http://rowan>

At least since the nineteenth century, a strong strain of Anglican theology has argued for the church's deep engagement with the well-being of society, grounded (as in Pope Francis's writing) not only in the doctrine of creation but in the belief that in Christ, God has definitively entered the natural world and (in John's memorable phrase) "lived among us" (John 1:14 NRSV).

In the mid-nineteenth century, Frederick Denison Maurice and a small group of like-minded clergy and laypeople became outspoken critics of the social costs of the rapid process of industrialization and urbanization that was remaking English society. While their distress was shared by many, what distinguished Maurice and his colleagues was their theological analysis of the social ills that troubled their conscience. They adopted the term *Christian Socialism* because the responses they proposed to the problems associated with the Industrial Revolution were ultimately theological.

Like Francis, Maurice understood that England's economic system rested on greed, competition, and a belief that freedom implied the option of accumulating wealth without any moral restraints. Because its roots violated God's order, the world of nineteenth century commerce inevitably led to social and spiritual misery. Economics, Maurice believed, must be shaped by the principles laid down by God that embraced cooperation rather than individualism; hence the need for careful reading of scripture to determine the Christian principles on which society is to be based. Indeed, Maurice considered that the fundamental task of theology was "not to build, but to dig, to show that economy and politics . . . must have a ground beneath themselves, that society is not to be made anew by arrangements of ours, but is to be regenerated by finding the law and ground of its order and harmony, the only secret of its existence, in God."<sup>9</sup> He affirms that all humankind is drawn into God's kingdom, and that our common relationship to God takes precedence over any human distinction.<sup>10</sup>

Maurice considered that Christian ethics is established on a few "fundamental maxims," culminating in the proposition that "the highest end of man's existence is to have fellowship with this Life

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[williams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/2107/the-richard-hooker-lecture-richard-hooker-c1554-1600-the-laws-of-ecclesiastical-polity-revisited](http://williams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/2107/the-richard-hooker-lecture-richard-hooker-c1554-1600-the-laws-of-ecclesiastical-polity-revisited).

<sup>9</sup> Frederick Maurice, ed., *The Life of Frederick Denison Maurice, chiefly told in his own letters* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1884), 2:136–137.

<sup>10</sup> Frederick Denison Maurice, *The Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven: A Course of Lectures on the Gospel of St. Luke* (London: Macmillan, 1893), 113.

and Light” (which is God and which is revealed in Christ), and “that fellowship or communion with each other is implied in this fellowship or communion with God and with His Son.”<sup>11</sup>

Maurice’s contemporary Charles Kingsley shared his concern over the consequences of the *laissez-faire* capitalism that encouraged England’s industrialization. Unlike Maurice, he was very much interested in the scientific discoveries that accompanied it. Kingsley strongly criticized the popular piety of his day for its failure to appreciate the natural world as God’s gift and for its judgment that the world is corrupt, ephemeral, and of no spiritual significance. The fallen—indeed *curse*d—dimension of the creation is not God’s doing, he insisted; rather, it is the fault of humankind: “Man’s work is too often the curse of the very planet which he misuses. None should know that better than the botanist, who sees whole regions desolate, and given up to sterility and literal thorns and thistles, on account of man’s sin and folly, ignorance and greedy waste.”<sup>12</sup>

Kingsley, however, called for a theology that is both scientific and biblical: “If it is to be scientific, it must begin by approaching Nature at once with a cheerful and reverent spirit, as a noble, healthy, and trustworthy thing.” He based his assertion on the positive view of the natural world as God’s creation, as found in many of the psalms, and supremely in the canticle known as the *Song of the Three Children*, in which heavenly bodies, the seasons, natural phenomena, hills and mountains, creatures of the air and land and sea join with humans and angels to sing praise to God.

Nearly a century later, William Temple, archbishop of Canterbury from 1942 to 1944, addressed the role of the church in the issues of his own day, and in doing so anticipated many of the pope’s concerns in *Laudato si’*. Temple understood that the practical effects of the incarnation for his and every time would emerge from the fruitful dialogue and work of people whose God-given knowledge and skill were dedicated to purposes that reflected the values of God’s reign. Temple’s book *Christianity and Social Order* is his effort to reassert what he considers a fundamental aspect of the church’s life, which is its right and duty to address issues of politics and economics.

<sup>11</sup> Frederick Denison Maurice, “The Epistle of St. John,” quoted in F. D. Maurice, *Reconstructing Christian Ethics: Selected Writings*, ed. Ellen K. Wondra (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 53.

<sup>12</sup> Charles Kingsley, “The Natural Theology of the Future,” Sion College, January 10th, 1871. <http://www.online-literature.com/charles-kingsley/scientific/7/>.

The church's attitude toward economic justice, in Temple's view, is based on the "fundamental Biblical principle" that "the earth—land—belongs to God; men enjoy the use of it," but that use must be regulated, not only so that each family would be provided for, but also "to ensure that all members of the community shared in the enjoyment of some portion." But, he insisted, "land is not a mere 'material resource'; human ownership is undertaken as "steward and trustee for the community."<sup>13</sup> Temple insisted that while the church has the right and the obligation to articulate the fundamental principles of Christian faith and their implications for how society is shaped, it has no special expertise with regard to how they are put into practice. Indeed, when the church moves from asserting principles to dictating practical methods, its proper role is "compromised by injudicious exercise." Hence the church "may declare the proper relation of the economic to other activities of men, but it cannot claim to know what will be the purely economic effect of such proposals." Nevertheless, Temple affirms, "economics are properly subject to a non-economic criterion."<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, in Temple's view, "nine-tenths of the work of the Church in the world is done by Christian people fulfilling responsibilities and performing tasks which in themselves are not part of the official system of the Church at all."<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the expertise required in order to make creation whole again also rests with people who may not be Christian at all, but who are, in Pope Francis's words, people of "good will."

Temple affirmed that "worship is the offer of our whole being and life—therefore very prominently our work—to God."<sup>16</sup> He insisted that the appropriateness of economic gain must always be subject to principles apart from the purely economic. Like his Anglican predecessors Maurice and Kingsley, as well as Pope Francis, Temple believed that economic principles are secondary to a doctrine of human nature. Like Francis, Temple argued for a political, economic, and educational system that recognizes the *personhood* of every human being, encourages a sense of human solidarity based

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<sup>13</sup> William Temple, *Christianity and Social Order* (London: Shephard-Walwyn, 1976), 48, 112.

<sup>14</sup> Temple, *Christianity and Social Order*, 31–32.

<sup>15</sup> Temple, *Christianity and Social Order*, 39.

<sup>16</sup> Temple, *Christianity and Social Order*, 95.

on the recognition of our common humanity, and offers to each the opportunity of meaningful work that will contribute to the common good. Respecting the personality of all human beings implies significant changes in the way human labor is undertaken. While “man is self-centered, he always carries with him abundant proof that this is not the real truth of his nature. He has to his credit both capacities and achievements that could never be derived from self-interest. The image of God—the image of holiness and love—is still there, though defaced; it is the source of his aspirations.” That divine image “is capable of response to the Divine Image” and enables human beings to perceive God’s glory and to be transformed “into the same image from glory to glory.”<sup>17</sup>

For Temple, the sanctity of human personality, a twentieth-century reflection on classical Anglican teaching about creation and incarnation, implied concrete implications. He cited the gap between rich and poor, inhumane working conditions, individualism that ignored the God-given bonds between people, the failure of education to provide guidance toward a proper understanding of vocation, and what he called “the problems of international trade” as subjects for a fully developed theology of the human person to address. Each of these issues comes to the pope’s attention in *Laudato si’*; Temple’s rigorous analysis provides a helpful point of dialogue and complements Francis’s approach.

The second half of the twentieth century saw the emergence of global attention to the threats posed to the environment. In 1962, the book *Silent Spring*, by the American biologist Rachel Carson, was an early and widely read study of the effects of environmental degradation on the health of human beings and the survival of earth’s species. As awareness of the crisis grew, many responded by demanding action from government to control the continuing damage to the natural world, by calling into question the assumption of free economic growth on which many of the world’s economies were based and that were blamed for much ecological damage, but also by examining critically the idea that humankind is somehow separate from the rest of creation, and proposing instead a vision that relates the interconnectedness of humankind to a broader vision of the human within the natural world.

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<sup>17</sup> Temple, *Christianity and Social Order*, 65–66.

Anglican responses to the heightened awareness of ecological danger drew heavily on the emphasis on the doctrine of creation and incarnation found in the work of theologians from Hooker to Temple. At the same time, an extended period of ecumenical liturgical experimentation and renewal focused on what Temple had already called for decades earlier: an awareness of the intimate relationship between creation and worship. In eucharist, we offer not only "ourselves, our souls and bodies," as Cranmer affirmed,<sup>18</sup> and our work, as Temple reminded us; the gifts of the earth are offered to God in thanksgiving and received back from God, blessed and made instruments of a deepened relationship with the Holy.

This deepened awareness has found expression in renewed liturgical resources from around the Anglican Communion. The Episcopal Church's 1979 revision of the Book of Common Prayer included a Eucharistic Prayer that invited worship focused on the doctrine of creation, the appropriate relationship of humankind to that creation, and the human failure to nurture that relationship:

God of all power, Ruler of the Universe, you are worthy of glory and praise.

At your command all things came to be: the vast expanse of interstellar space, galaxies, suns, the planets in their courses, and this fragile earth our island home.

From the primal elements you brought forth the human race, and blessed us with memory, reason and skill. You made us the rulers of creation. But we turned against you, and betrayed our trust; and we turned against one another.<sup>19</sup>

A decade later, the Anglican Church of Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia published its widely acclaimed liturgy, *A New Zealand Prayer Book*, which emphasizes human responsibility to care for creation:

We pray:

for those who make decisions about the resources of the earth, **that we may use your gifts responsibly;**

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<sup>18</sup> *The Book of Common Prayer*, 336.

<sup>19</sup> *The Book of Common Prayer*, 370.

for those who work on the land and the sea, in city and in industry, **that all may enjoy the fruits of their labour and marvel at your creation.**<sup>20</sup>

The Episcopal Church's publication *Enriching Our Worship* offers even clearer examples of liturgical awareness of the ecological crisis in both theological and practical terms. Its eucharistic liturgies include affirmation of the creation as God's gift, acceptance of the human responsibility to care for it, and acknowledgement of human failure.

From before time you made ready the creation. Your Spirit moved over the deep and brought all things into being: sun, moon, and stars; earth, winds, and waters; and every living thing.<sup>21</sup>

You gave the world into our care that we might be your faithful stewards and show forth your bountiful grace. But we failed to honor your image in one another and in ourselves; we would not see your goodness in the world around us, and so we violated your creation.<sup>22</sup>

These liturgical evocations of the wholeness of the created order and the place of the human race within it demonstrate a deep congruence between the pope's call for a spirituality reflective of the hymn of St. Francis and the eucharistic piety expressed in the Anglican liturgical tradition.

Increased focus on care of the environment is also reflected in other aspects of Anglican church life beyond worship. In 1985, the Standing Commissions on Metropolitan Affairs and World Mission of the Episcopal Church produced a "Common Statement," in which they asserted that

environmental, resource and population stresses are intensifying and will increasingly determine the quality of human life on our planet. These stresses are already serious enough to deny many millions of people basic needs of

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<sup>20</sup> *A New Zealand Prayer Book* (Auckland, N.Z.: Tuia, 1988), 463.

<sup>21</sup> *Enriching Our Worship I* (New York: Church Publishing, 1998), 60.

<sup>22</sup> *Enriching Our Worship I*, 58.

food, shelter, health and jobs, or any hope of betterment. At the same time the earth's carrying capacity—the ability of biological systems to provide resources for human needs—is eroding. . . . There can be neither peace nor justice as long as there are drastic differences in access to food, water and energy among the people of the earth.<sup>23</sup>

Recent theological reflection across the spectrum of Anglican scholarship has underscored these observations. The English physicist and priest John Polkinghorne notes that contemporary physics endorses a “holistic and relational” perspective that demands that “humanity [be] considered in relation to the rest of creation.”<sup>24</sup> New Testament scholar and bishop Frederick Borsch wrote, “We are all part of the world we are trying to understand. Our world of experience is not something without us that we can dispassionately examine. It is a world we are within and that is within us. In and with this world we must interact.”<sup>25</sup>

In 1997, the Episcopal Church's General Convention approved a resolution establishing a Working Group (later made a permanent committee) on Science, Technology and Faith, which could represent the Episcopal Church in ecumenical conversations as well as help in the education of clergy and laypeople on relevant issues and “bring Anglican insight and expertise into the network of existing ecumenical and interfaith working groups, centers, task forces, and associations at all levels.” Comprising a number of Episcopal scientists and clergy with scientific expertise (including Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori, herself a marine biologist), the committee created a Subcommittee on Creation that published a study document entitled “A Catechism of Creation: An Episcopal Understanding” in June of 2005.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Anne Rowthorn, *The Liberation of the Laity* (Wilton, Conn.: Morehouse-Barlow, 1986), 108–109.

<sup>25</sup> Frederick Borsch, *The Spirit Searches Everything: Keeping Life's Questions* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cowley Publications, 2005), 39.

<sup>25</sup> John Polkinghorne, *The God of Hope and the End of the World* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2002), 16–17.

<sup>26</sup> 1997 General Convention of the Episcopal Church, Resolution DO24 ([https://episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts\\_resolution.pl?resolution=1997-D024](https://episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts_resolution.pl?resolution=1997-D024)).

The document affirms a biblically based doctrine of creation centered on its relation to God as creator but also emphasizes human-kind's "obligation to care for God's creation."

### **What specifically does the Bible say about this obligation?**

Genesis 1:26–28 states that human beings are created in God's "image and likeness" and given dominion over all other creatures. "Dominion" does not mean "domination," but refers to the need for humans to exercise responsibility for the earth as God's representatives. In Genesis 2, the human beings are given the garden to tend and serve, symbolizing our obligation to care for creation. . . . As "the earth is the Lord's and everything in it" (Ps. 24:1), we human beings are called upon to tend, serve, and protect the earth as a sacred trust for which we shall one day give an accounting.<sup>27</sup>

In language reminiscent of *Laudato si'*, the Catechism challenges everyone to care for "other creatures and their habitats," caring for the land, air, and water, "protecting the creatures that form its ecological communities . . . [and] places of beauty that have value in themselves, feed our spirits, and support life for other species."<sup>28</sup>

Contemporary Anglican perspectives can complement the pope's reflections most fruitfully in areas where concrete undertakings bring together theological insights and practical action.

One such area is in the development of liturgical communities inspired by a theology of creation. In the twenty-first century, a broad movement known in Britain as "Fresh Expressions" and in the United States as "Emerging Church" has concretized the insights of liturgical reform in the formation of new Christian communities with roots in denominational and monastic traditions, but emphasizing the commitment to living out Christian faith in intentional communities. Often related to but moving beyond organized congregations and other church institutions, they utilize contemporary technology

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<sup>27</sup> Committee on Science, Technology, and Faith, "A Catechism of Creation: An Episcopal Understanding," 2005, part 3, p. 16, <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/files/CreationCatechism.pdf>.

<sup>28</sup> "A Catechism on Creation," p. 18.

and often draw participants from those with little or no formal spiritual background. They are often acutely aware of threats to human community and the natural environment, and both explore and witness to the need for changed human behavior and attitudes toward the environmental crisis based on a creation-centered spirituality. Analysts of new monastic movements identify their attractiveness in their offer of

simplicity in a context of complexity. Our lives are multi-stranded, all of our actions solicit reactions, and almost all our decisions involve a compromise of some sort. New monastic communities articulate a desire to live more simply, to cause less damage to the individuals involved and to the wider world. . . .

That monasticism encourages a love for the earth and its creatures is a further reason for its attractiveness. . . . The online community Earth Abbey describe[s] itself as “a movement of people helping one another to live more in tune with the earth” and of pursuing a “life-affirming, creative spirituality.” The monastic terminology used by Earth Abbey is no accident.<sup>29</sup>

Perhaps the flexibility demonstrated in the new liturgical communities springing up around the Anglican Communion and beyond points to an ecclesial style that could enrich some of the assumptions from which Pope Francis proceeds.

Mary Hunt, a lay Roman Catholic feminist theologian, has written,

Three substantive issues in Catholic life—marriage equality, feminist ministry, and reproductive justice—reveal why I am ambivalent at best about the papacy of Francis contributing to a postcolonial church. . . . In marriage, ordination, and abortion, the kyriarchal model of authority and

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<sup>29</sup> Ian Adams and Ian Mobsby, “New Monasticism,” in Steven Croft and Ian Mobsby, eds., *Fresh Expressions in the Sacramental Tradition* (Norwich, U.K.: Canterbury Press, 2009), 57, 61–62.

decision-making results in the continued oppression of large groups of people.<sup>30</sup>

Ultimately the question she raises is a difficult, complex, and important one. The principle of subsidiarity or diffused authority has played an important part in Roman Catholic Social Teaching since the late nineteenth century, but it has rarely, if ever, been applied to the exercise of authority within the church itself. In *Laudato si'*, Francis lauds the concept as an important principle for political decision making, but does not apply it to the church. The Virginia Report, the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission's presentation to the 1998 Lambeth Conference, made clear the importance of subsidiarity in the life of the Anglican Communion in conjunction with interdependence.<sup>31</sup>

In his emphasis on the importance of lay Christians in confronting the ecological crisis, the pope can draw on rich resources from Vatican II, especially its Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity.<sup>32</sup> But Anglican Christianity has a centuries-long and evolving history of including laypeople in its decision making, and contemporary developments such as those of the Fresh Expressions/Emerging Church movement provide concrete examples of how diffused authority and the full inclusion of laypeople in ministry can contribute to a spirituality such as Pope Francis calls for.

Another contribution to the dialogue with *Laudato si'* that Anglican faith and practice has to offer is an openness to an evolving examination of faith and practice in the light of new understandings and insights prompted by deepened awareness of the implications of context.

It is difficult to avoid drawing a relationship between the population explosion of the twentieth century and the heightened degradation of the planet that accompanied it. As recently as 1930 Anglican teaching was highly cautious about any attempts at artificial birth control, and dubious about limiting births as a means of

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<sup>30</sup> Mary E. Hunt, "Postcolonial Catholics: A U.S. Feminist Perspective" in Nicolás Panotto, ed., *Pope Francis in Postcolonial Reality: Complexities, Ambiguities and Paradoxes* (n.p.: Borderless Press, 2015), 88.

<sup>31</sup> "The Virginia Report," chapter 4, in *The Official Report of the Lambeth Conference 1998* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Morehouse Publishing, 1999), 43–49.

<sup>32</sup> "Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity," in Abbott, *The Documents of Vatican II*, 489–521.

addressing social problems. At the Lambeth Conference in that year, the bishops of the Anglican Communion warned that

where there is clearly felt moral obligation to limit or avoid parenthood, the method must be decided on Christian principles. . . . While the Conference admits that economic conditions are a serious factor in the situation, it condemns the propaganda which treats conception control as a way of meeting those unsatisfactory social and economic conditions which ought to be changed by the influence of Christian public opinion.<sup>33</sup>

However, as the impact of the population explosion of the mid-twentieth century became clear and its impact on the planet's resources ever more obvious, the bishops of the Anglican Communion were able to underline the importance of slowing the growth of the population in terms that might have well shocked their predecessors:

The Conference believes that the responsibility for deciding upon the number and frequency of children has been laid by God upon the consciences of parents everywhere; that this planning, in such ways as are mutually acceptable to husband and wife in Christian conscience, is a right and important factor in Christian family life and should be the result of positive choice before God. Such responsible parenthood, built on obedience to all the duties of marriage, requires a wise stewardship of the resources and abilities of the family as well as a thoughtful consideration of the varying population needs and problems of society *and the claims of future generations*.<sup>34</sup>

The insights of creation theology as earlier generations had articulated it served to provide a framework for addressing the issue of rapid expansion of the population, but flexibility regarding changed circumstances and the urgency they created enabled the

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<sup>33</sup> 1930 Lambeth Conference, Resolutions 16 and 17. <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/127734/1930.pdf>.

<sup>34</sup> 1958 Lambeth Conference, Resolution 115. <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/127740/1958.pdf>, emphasis added.

bishops to evolve a theological approach more directly related to their contemporary reality.

The experience of diversity in practical theology, especially in dialogue with the circumstances in which faith is practiced, has been part of the Anglican tradition for most of its history. The document *To Set Our Hope on Christ*, written in response to the Anglican Communion's Windsor Commission, which had requested an explanation for the Episcopal Church's decision to allow the blessing of same-sex unions, reminded readers that the church has always experienced conflict over the practice of Christian faith, and that such conflicts were often "good faith attempts to live out different visions and different values, all of which could be rooted in scripture and defended by biblical arguments." It goes on to affirm a trust in the guidance of the Holy Spirit in dialogue with new understandings, often the product of scientific and social scientific reflection. It notes that just as deeper understanding of the implications of the gospel brought the Episcopal Church to new conclusions about the rightful place of gay and lesbian people in the Church, Anglicans had also come to consider slavery as incompatible with the gospel, and in the twentieth century to recognize the appropriateness of ordaining women to ministries traditionally restricted to men.<sup>35</sup>

### Conclusion

In his encyclical, Francis draws on the data from a variety of sources, including the input of science and of people of faith in a variety of contexts, to present his case. Would the Anglican experience of doctrinal flexibility in the face of changed awareness and circumstances contribute to the conversion that Francis calls for? Might that perspective prove to be an important resource in the interpretation and implementation of *Laudato si'*?

Perhaps because he recognized that the church has expertise about ends but not means, and because he understood that approaches and solutions are radically dependent on context, the pope limits himself to identifying five dialogues that are important for responding to the planetary crisis. He urges dialogue in the international community. He emphasizes the need for new policies at both

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<sup>35</sup> *To Set Our Hope on Christ: A Response to the Invitation of Windsor Report ¶135* (The Episcopal Church Center, New York: 2005), 11–44. [http://archive.episcopalchurch.org/documents/ToSetOurHope\\_eng.pdf](http://archive.episcopalchurch.org/documents/ToSetOurHope_eng.pdf).

the national and the local level that will seek out long-term solutions to endemic problems. He stresses the importance of transparency in decision making. He raises the issue of the relationship between politics and the economy. And he encourages the world's religions to engage in dialogue with science.

*Laudato si'* carries the formidable weight of the Roman Catholic Church's teaching ministry into the heart of the global conversation about the future of our planet. Not only Christians of other traditions, but all people who share its concerns can welcome its strong and unequivocal perspective but also the genuine invitation to join in a worldwide dialogue to address the urgent issues it identifies. Anglicans who share the pope's concern for the earth's future must welcome and applaud its clarity, its passion, and its openness to conversation with other traditions.

It has been the intention of this article to demonstrate that the Anglican tradition in its many dimensions—theological, liturgical, ecclesial—offers centuries of reflection and practice affirming Francis's concern, and at the same time offers significant insights and approaches for carrying the conversation beyond discussion to practice. Roman Catholics and Anglicans can draw from different and complementary resources to make common cause in the godly vocation to tend the earth we share. In the process, we may discover other common ground and opportunities for learning from each other that make it possible to declare with new certainty that “there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling” (Eph. 4:4), and that our calling may be nothing less than the common tending of our common home.

