

## Hope, Action and the Eucharist in Creation

### *Statement on the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation*

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*We know that all creation is groaning . . . (Rom. 8:22)*

*For in hope we were saved. (Rom. 8:24)*

On this World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, Pope Francis [invites](#) us to meditate on Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans (8:19-25). This year, the message of hope and care for creation resonates deeply with the Catholic community in the United States that continues to experience the joy of the National Eucharistic Congress. Drawing from the thought of Pope Francis and Pope Benedict XVI, we offer these reflections on hope in the Lord in a scientific age, which impel us to renew once more the call to care for all of God's creation.

Pope Benedict addressed the role of science in the making of the modern world in his encyclical *Spe Salvi*, which means "in hope we were saved." In this historical account, thought about redemption experienced a significant shift in the early 1600s under the influence of the English philosopher Francis Bacon.<sup>1</sup> The hope in Jesus Christ, who would restore mankind to Paradise, was replaced by a hope in science and "faith in progress" to build a new world of the "kingdom of man", filled with "a vision of foreseeable inventions—including the airplane and the submarine."<sup>2</sup> In other words, people started looking to science for redemption rather than to God. In many ways, our present world is Bacon's world, which explains both an almost spiritual hope in techno-scientific progress and the crisis of Christian hope, indeed Christianity itself. If we are to be saved in hope, that hope must be in God. When hope for salvation is placed in scientific progress, hopes, stories and attention drift from amazing grace to amazing gadgets.

Pope Benedict's insight into the foundational architecture of Bacon's kingdom of man anticipates a central concern of Pope Francis' teachings on ecology described in *Laudato Si'* and *Laudate Deum*, namely, the technocratic paradigm, whereby the unchecked power of technology drives the progressive devastation of the planet.<sup>3</sup> The damaged fruit of our technocratic endeavors, a spoiled planet, is a problem that algorithms, machines and technologies can never solve.

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 17.

<sup>3</sup> See Tony Mills, [Is Pope Francis Anti-Modern?](#), The New Atlantis, Fall 2015.

“Man always remains man” and the idea that we can redeem humankind “purely from the outside,”<sup>4</sup> through economic systems or via technocratic solutions, as contemporary techno-optimists suggest, is misdirected. The human-constructed world will always be a mirror reflection of humanity, both awe-inspiring and broken, just as we are.<sup>5</sup> There is no world we can build that prevents us from facing the human paradox at the core of the Holy Father’s message: “*the whole creation groans* (cf. *Rom 8:19-22*), we Christians groan (cf. vv. 23-25) and the Spirit himself groans (cf. vv. 26-27). *This groaning expresses apprehension and suffering, together with longing and desire.*”<sup>6</sup>

Our collective groaning points us to the human condition, which is precisely where the Christian message, the Good News, comes alive: We are *not* left to our own devices! God is with us. *Laudato Si’* begins with St. Francis of Assisi and St. Paul’s letter to the Romans, stating that creation is alive,<sup>7</sup> that we have a sister in water and a brother in the sun. God is always with us, as the entire Canticle of Creatures, addressed to the all-powerful good Lord, testifies repeatedly.

Our collective groaning is met with a voice, the Word. What does it say? To St. Francis of Assisi, whom the Holy Father has chosen as his namesake and guide in our times, the Lord says: “go and rebuild my Church.” The re-building can only happen in continuity with the first edifice, which has Jesus Christ as the cornerstone, the rock that holds everything together.

Jesus chose to remain with us in a specific and concrete way, in his Body and Blood. Without the Eucharist, there can be no People of God: “The Church produces the Eucharist, but the Eucharist also produced the Church.”<sup>8</sup> This is why it should be of no surprise that the poor man of Assisi had a profound reverence and respect for the Body and Blood of the Lord. The “root and source” of St. Francis’ love for peace, poverty and care for creation was Jesus Christ.<sup>9</sup>

In and through the Eucharist we have continuous access to the source of St. Francis’ love and devotion. This year’s National Eucharistic Congress in the United States has witnessed the closeness of Jesus, reminding us that He is the hope that saves. A true Eucharistic experience will also recommit us to the task of protecting creation, “one that is eminently *theological*, for it is the point where the mystery of man and the mystery of God intersect.”<sup>10</sup> The care for creation is constitutive of the Christian life. So let us go forth, with hope, to care for all of God’s creation.

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<sup>4</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 21.

<sup>5</sup> See Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis, *Message for the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation*, 27 June, 2024.

<sup>7</sup> Bruno Latour, *The Immense Cry Channeled by Pope Francis*, Nov. 1, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Henri de Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church*, Ignatius Press, p. 133.

<sup>9</sup> Pope Francis, *Speech to the Members of the Ecclesial Coordination for the Franciscan VIII Centenary*, Oct. 31, 2022.

<sup>10</sup> Pope Francis, *Message for the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation*, 27 June, 2024.