Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si’* is driven by the conviction that creation is “good news,” and thus “gospel.”¹ Only the first (§§ 65-75) and final (§§ 96-100) sections of Chapter Two focus directly upon the Word of God.²


² I indicate, in the name of my professional guild, examples of traditional defects in the pontifical use of the Scriptures that continue in *Laudato Si’*. No doubt experts were consulted, and the majority of associations between the argument of the Encyclical and the use of the biblical text are appropriate. Some are “appropriations” that call for some imagination, but that is acceptable in a document like *Laudato Si’*. However, there are places where one would expect better, given the high quality of contemporary Catholic biblical scholarship. When referring to words of Jesus from the Synoptic tradition, the Matthean text is invariably used (see, for example, the use of Matthew 20:25-26 in § 82; Matthew 13:31-32 in § 97, and Matthew 8:27 in § 98). It is almost universally accepted that Matthew (written in the late 80’s CE) is dependent upon Mark (written about 70 CE). The Markan text should be used (in this case, Mark 10:42-43; 4:30-32, and 4:41, respectively). See the clear summary of this widely accepted position in John S. Kloppenborg, *Q, the Earliest Gospel: An Introduction to the Original Stories and Sayings of Jesus* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 1-40. More serious is the uncritical application of the “woman clothed with the sun” of Revelation 12:1 to Mary as “the Mother and Queen of all creation” (*Laudato
It is not my task to review the ecological science that lies behind the Holy Father’s explicit use of the biblical text, or the many occasional references scattered throughout the Encyclical. However, as a professional Catholic biblical scholar, it is a relief to have Pontifical support to abandon once and for all a fundamentalist “seven days of creation” view (see, for example, *Laudato Si’*, 2 and 9).3

**The Use of the Bible in *Laudato Si’***

The papal use of biblical texts and traditions in the Encyclical is easily traced in the document, especially §§ 65-97 and 96-100. What follows will offer a sketch of that material, but its main focus – in a second and more novel fashion – is to raise a question in response to *Laudato Si’* asking if, despite the abundance of biblical reference, more could and should be said.

---

The Wisdom of the Biblical Accounts (Laudato Si’, §§ 65-97)

In dialogue with contemporary biblical scholarship, Laudato Si’ insists that Genesis 1:1-2:4a and 2:4b-3:24, ancient stories eventually shaped to form part of Israel’s Sacred Scriptures, communicate profound religious truth (Laudato Si’, §§ 65-67, 70-71). The story-tellers told of relationships “with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself” (Laudato Si’, § 66). At the apex of God’s creative activity, human beings, male and female, are made in the image of God (1:26-27). According to the Bible, humans are interpersonal creatures, including personal relationship with the living God. “Humans are created in such a way that their very existence is intended to be their relationship with God.” Dominion over other creatures (v. 28) does not justify ecological destruction. Human beings, made in the image of God, are asked to cooperate with the creator, ensuring that the whole world be “good” (tōb), that the natural world, despite its challenges, be the good creation that God made it to be “in the beginning” (1:1). This view is made very clear in the Eden story, where God takes the newly created human (’adam) into the Garden of Eden in order “to till and keep it.” The Hebrew word we translate as “till” (’abad) has the basic meaning of “serve” (see Laudato Si’, §§ 66-67, 124). God’s final rest, on the seventh day, aetiologically rooted in the Jewish practice of Sabbath, is a sign of God’s covenant blessing (Laudato Si’, § 71).

4 For more on what follows, see Edwards, Jesus and the Natural World, 10-15.

5 Claus Westermann, Genesis. A Commentary, trans John J. Scullion, 3 vols. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984-1986), 1: 156-57, points out that the “singularity” of the creation of man and woman is influenced by the origins of this saying. It “had its origin in an independent narrative about the creation of human beings which in its present form has been completely integrated into a narrative about the creation of the world.” Once in its new context, it must be interpreted within that context.

6 Claus Westermann, Genesis, 1:158.

7 The Hebrew word tōb, is translated regularly (especially in Genesis 1:1-2:4), as “good.” This is correct, but it carries with it a further meaning: who is described as “good” is exactly as God created it to me. On this, see Brendan Byrne, Inheriting the Earth. The Pauline basis of a spirituality for our time (Homebush: St Paul Publications, 1990), 14-19.

8 The word “aetiology” describes a narrative that looks back from an existing practice or experience, in this case, the practice of Sabbath within Israelite religion, and explains its “origins” in its mythic past. As a “myth,” one cannot trace its historical origins, but one finds there the theological and religious significance of the current celebration.
Francis J. Moloney

source, and its ongoing existence (Laudato Si’, §§ 12, 68-69, 72, 77, 94, 124).9 Nothing is imperfect before God, as everything is “good” (Laudato Si’, § 65). Humans have a “caring” role of their fellow creatures in the community of God’s creation. Male and female are the basis of the social nature of the human person; human sexuality is “good,” and women are equal before God.10 God’s rest on the Sabbath is aetologically rooted in the Jewish practice of Sabbath, but it is more: a sign of God’s covenant blessing, and an invitation to take time for rest, for celebration, for joy in family, friends and community life (see Laudato Si’, § 71).11

Genesis unfolds into insights into human sin, rooted in disobedience to the word of God, bringing alienation from God, tensions between man and woman, violence among human beings, and from the natural world, including the animals which become hostile, and the earth which must be dug with the sweat of one’s brow (3:1-24) (Laudato Si’, §§ 70-71). Pope Francis draws a number of interesting reflections from the ambiguous narratives of sin and grace that fill Genesis 4-11 to indicate that God never withdrew his promise of salvation. In the midst of the wickedness that covered all the earth (see Genesis 6:5), the just man Noah emerges. Through him, “God decided to open a path to salvation. … All it takes is one good person to restore hope!” (Laudato Si’, § 71. See Gen 8:20-9:17).

Francis’ optimism is pervasive. After the account of the Tower of Babel in Gen 11, we come to learn more of the enduring promise of salvation from God. As human beings scatter across the face of the earth, divided by their languages (Gen 11:1-9), God calls Abraham, in whom all nations will be blessed (Gen 12:1-3; 22:15-18; 28:14 [promise renewed to Jacob]). A long biblical history begins in which human beings bear responsibility before God to respect and care for the integrity of other creatures. We have “our place” in God’s creation, and it is not one of “dominion” (Laudato Si’, §§ 67-68).12

---

9 A glance at these indications in Laudato Si’ shows a use of important themes in Israel’s Wisdom traditions (see Wisdom 6:7; 11:24; 13:5 [Romans 1:20], Proverbs 22:2; Ben Sira 38:34; Psalms 104, 136, 148).

10 “This is another important aetiological narrative (see above, note 8) that retains its crucial importance for contemporary society and culture.

11 Laudato Si’, 71, develops this theme of rest very well. Pope Francis not only uses the narrative texts from Genesis (Gen 2:2-3) and Exodus (Exod 16:23; 23:10), but also turns to the legislation of the Sabbath rest found in Leviticus (see Lev 19:9-10; 25:1-4, 4-6, 10).

12 As Pope Francis closes the Encyclical, he prays: “God of love, show us our place in
The Holy Father uses biblical traditions to insist that humans are part of a community: e.g., Prov 3:19; Psal 104 and 148; Is 40:28b-29 (Laudato Si’, §§ 68-69, 72, 73). The Word of God communicates these truths directly to human beings, made in the image of God. Human beings, able to enter into communion with God, are called by these biblical passages to rejoice with God in the whole world of creation, of which we are members and not masters. This is to think biblically, to see ourselves in the community of creation. It calls for conversion, away from anthropocentric and exploitive attitudes, towards profound respect for the integrity of our fellow creatures before God.

The gaze of Jesus (Laudato Si’, §§ 96-100)

Surprisingly, the Holy Father largely limits his New Testament reflections to the experience of Jesus, his awareness of God as his Father, and the father of all (Laudato Si’, § 96), shaped by the world in which he grew up and ministered, using images from the world that surrounded him and his audience (Laudato Si’, §§ 96-97). He refers to Jesus’ experience of the world of human labour (Laudato Si’, § 98). More could be taken from the Gospels. For example, as Mark tells briefly of Jesus’ encounter with Satan at the beginning of his ministry (Mark 1:12-13), once Satan is overcome, Jesus, in the desert, “was with the wild beasts, and the angels ministered to him” (v. 13). When read as an allusion to the Roman persecution of the Marcan Christians, this interpretation misses an important element of Mark’s message. Having overcome Satan, the situation of Eden is re-established, eliminating the animosity of the wild beasts generated by the presence of sin when it first entered the world (see Gen 3:14). The idyllic perfection of human oneness with the wild beast, dreamt of in the messianic passage of Is 11:1-9 (when the wolf dwells with the lamb, and the child plays over the

this world as channels of your love for all the creatures of this earth.”

13 One misses reference to the splendid affirmation of God’s lordship and the unique relationship he has with creation found in Job 38:1-39:2. On this, see Edwards, Jesus and the Natural World, 19-21.
14 See Edwards, Partaking of God, 147-82.
15 See also Edwards, Jesus and the Natural World, 26-31.
hole of the asp), is restored. An early Jewish tradition asked what Adam and Eve ate in the Garden. Mark responds: “the angels ministered to him.” The advent of Jesus restores creation to the way God made it “at the beginning” (see Mark 1:1; Gen 1:1).16

One might also have expected more on the great texts from New Testament that link the pre-existent Logos, Lord, and Christ with creation. Col 1:16, 19-20 and John 1:1-18 are briefly mentioned (Laudato Si’, §§ 99-100). Paul’s eloquent reference to the yearning and the birth pangs of the whole of creation, including the baptized, of Rom 8:18-25 (side-by-side with Gen 2:7) is cited in paragraph 2. The Holy Father draws attention to “[t]his is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she ‘groans in travail’” (Rom 8:22). Paul no doubt had another purpose in mind when he wrote those words, but it “works” for Pope Francis. As the title of this section of the Encyclical (“The gaze of Jesus”) indicates, the Holy Father wishes to focus his attention upon Jesus of Nazareth.17 He insists that “[t]he very flowers of the field and the birds which his human eyes contemplated and admired are now imbued with his radiant presence” (Laudato Si’, § 100). The great cosmological texts from the Christian biblical tradition are less relevant in that setting.18


17 A deliberate focus upon the experience of the historical Jesus is indicated by the choice of the term “Jesus,” rather than “Christ” in the sub-title.

18 The Papal use of Rom 8:22 is but one example of what I described above in note 2 as an “appropriation that calls for imagination.” The biblical text suits the Holy Father’s context very well, however much it reflects (or does not reflect) what Paul wanted to say when he penned (or dictated: see Rom 16:22) the letter in c. 58 CE. Pope Francis passingly cites passages from John 1:1-18 and Col 1:15-20, but what of Phil 2:5-11, and Eph 1:3-5? For further reflections on John 1:1-18 and Rom 8:18-25, see Edwards, Jesus and the Natural World, 33-39. Pauline scholars will be disappointed by the absence of reference to the Pauline and post-Pauline tradition. See, for example, Brendan Byrne, “A Pauline Complement to Laudato Si’”, in Theological Studies 77 (2016), 308-327. Some Johannine
The Lamb that Was Slain “Before the Foundation of the World” (Rev 13:8)

Within this exciting environment generated by Pope Francis’ prophetic response to the new cosmology, a further biblical theme from the Book of Revelation calls for attention. This inspired, but puzzling, text from our Christian tradition is the subject of vast erudition, and sometimes unfounded speculation.19 I take my cue for what follows from the largely ignored interpretation of Eugenio Corsini.20 For Corsini, John the Seer does not scholars, who see creation as an all-pervading theme across the Gospel, a view I do not share, will also be disappointed. See especially, the work of Mary Coloe (e.g., “Creation in the Gospel of John,” in Creation is Groaning: Biblical and Theological Perspectives, ed. Mary Coloe [Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2013], 71-90; “The Garden as a New Creation in John,” The Bible Today 53 [2015]: 159-64). For my rejection of the popular “seven days of a new creation” in John 1:19-2:12, see Francis J. Moloney, The Gospel of John, Sacra Pagina 4 (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 50-63, and my rejection of the “creation-recreation” theme in 18:1-11 and 19:38-42, in ibid., 484, 513.

19 A good indication of this is the massive “selected” bibliography, arranged historically, in Craig A. Koester, Revelation, Anchor Yale Bible 38A (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 113-206.

20 My reading of the Book of Revelation is guided by the remarkable, but little known, work of this Italian emeritus Professor of Early Christian Literature at the University of Turin. In brief, the book is not dedicated to the encouragement of persecuted Christians at the end of the first century (although that can also be involved), but a statement and re-statement of the perennial revelation of God’s saving activity in the death and resurrection of Jesus “from the foundation of the world.” After the decisive heavenly liturgy of Rev 4-5, the conclusion of each “seven” announces the saving event of Jesus’ death and resurrection (8:1 [seals]; 11:15-19 [trumpets]; 16:17-22:5 [bowls]). See the English version of his 1982 study (Apocalisse prima e dopo) in Eugenio CORSINI, The Apocalypse: The Perennial Revelation of Jesus Christ, trans. Francis J. Moloney, Good News Studies 5 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1983). See now, Eugenio CORSINI, Apocalisse di Gesù secondo Giovanni (Torino: Società Editrice Internazionale, 2002). For a summary of his argument, see Moloney, Reading the New Testament in the Church, 180-89. The most exhaustive contemporary commentary on Revelation in English is David E. AUNE, Revelation, Word Biblical Commentary 52a-52c (Dallas, TX: Word, 1997-1998). In more than 1300 pages, Aune mentions Corsini twice, in association with his identification of the 144,000 in 7:4-8 (pp. 440, 447). The highly regarded most recent commentary by Koester, Revelation, never mentions Corsini’s interpretation, not even in the 93 page general bibliography (see above, note 19), even though it has been available in English since 1983. I acknowledge the support of my colleague Stuart Moran, well-versed in the work of Corsini, for the following reflections.
write to encourage late-first century Christians to persevere, or to resist, in the presence of the imperial power, or in the face of persecution. Such lived realities may well have formed part of the *Sitz im Leben* that produced the book. But its driving theological motivation is to communicate belief that the saving effects of the crucified and risen Christ have *already* assured victory over the corrupt powers of this world in both the former (pre-Christian) covenant, and in the Christian era.\(^{21}\) John the Seer articulates this belief by means of carefully arranged statements and re-statements of that fundamental Christian truth through the opening of seven seals, the sounding of seven trumpets, and the pouring out of seven bowls.\(^{22}\)

*The Perennial Relevance of the Death and Resurrection of Jesus*

In brief, Corsini sees the book as based upon a series of “sevens.” After the introduction (1:1-8), there are letters to seven Churches (Rev 1:9-3:22), seven seals to the scroll (4:1-8:1), and seven trumpets (8:2-11:19). An interlude looks back upon the teaching of the seals and the trumpets (12:1-14:20). The cosmic drama of the pouring out of the seven bowls follows. The bowls are poured out (15:1-16:21), and a long section is dedicated to a description of the effects of the events accompanying the pouring out of the bowls (17:1-22:5). The book closes with an epilogue (22:6-21). Crucially, the scenes and events associated with the opening of the seals, the blowing of the trumpets, and the pouring out of the bowls, each tell of the saving effect of the Lamb, slain and risen before all time. This saving effect is applied initially to the faithful of the period prior to the historical presence of Jesus, the so-called “old economy,” and then to the current Christians,

\(^{21}\) I thus regard the association of Rev 15:3 with Roman persecution in *Laudato Si’,* 74, as at best questionable. Aune, *Revelation,* and Koester, *Revelation,* are fine examples of an interpretation that asks persecuted Christians to face persecution with faith and hope. Loren L. Johns, *The Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse,* Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 167 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), questions this with her fine study of the possibility that the work asks Christians to resist the cult of emperor worship passively.

\(^{22}\) I acknowledge that my attention was drawn to the potential contribution of the biblical image of Revelation’s slain and risen Lamb to current theological reflection upon ecological issues by my friend and colleague at Australian Catholic University, Rev. Professor Anthony J. Kelly, C.Ss.R.
reading or hearing the message of this document in the era after Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Rejecting contemporary commentary, Corsini insists that there is no literary and theological tension building up across the various visionary experiences, waiting for a final “end time” intervention in the pouring out of the final bowl and its aftermath. On the contrary, each “seven” repeats the story of the saving effect of the Lamb from a different perspective and in varying intensity. The conclusion of each “seven” announces the saving event of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

- In 8:1, at the opening of the seventh seal: “there was silence in heaven for about half an hour,” reminiscent of the darkness over the earth that precedes Jesus’ death in Mark 14:33.
- The sounding of the seventh trumpet leads to a resounding acclamation of the victory of God in and through Jesus’ death and resurrection: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of God and of his Messiah” (11:15). It closes with a report of events, reminiscent of the Gospel accounts, especially, but not only, Matthew 27:51-54, of the death of Jesus: “Then God’s temple in heaven was opened and the ark of the covenant was seen within his temple; and there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail” (see also Mark 15:33-39; Luke 23:44-46).
- A theme familiar from the moment of Jesus’ death in John 19:30 reappears as the seventh bowl is poured out: “It is done” (11:17).23

The bulk of contemporary interpretation reads the puzzling use of apocalyptic imagery and thought-patterns as a divinely sanctioned destruction of the universe, to be replaced by the new heaven and the new earth (21:1), a holy city that comes down out of the heaven of God (v. 2). In the light of that interpretation, little wonder that *Laudato Si*’ almost entirely ignores the Book of Revelation, citing only three passages (15:3 [§ 74], 12:1 [§ 241],

23 This is the most important contribution of Corsini. Each septet reaches a Christological climax, proclaiming the saving event of the death and resurrection. But each septet has also indicated that this “saving event” also acts for the faithful Hebrew people of the old dispensation. This is possible because of the pre-existence of the slain and risen Lamb whose influence affects the whole of history. For more precision on the so-called “reminiscences” indicated in the dot points above, see further, notes 29, 30, and 32.
and 21:5 [§ 243]). Such a destructive vision is of little help in ecological thinking. The interpretation presented here, following Corsini, summons Christians to enjoy the life of the new earth and the new Jerusalem now. It is already in place because Jesus’ death and resurrection has been present to the universe from before the foundation of the world. The image of life in the new Jerusalem, centred on the river of life-giving waters and the tree of life (22:1-5), is that of a pristine creation that gives life and healing to all creatures. The symbol of the city not only images a return to the ideal situation of Gen 1-2, but depicts a pristine creation in harmony with human civilisation represented by “the city.” It does not advocate social primitivism, but affirms that the values of economics, culture, artistic creativity, and ecology are not irreconcilable. The Book of Revelation is not an encouragement to wait and suffer with patience and hope for the coming of the Lord. The words of Jesus at the very beginning of the book state that the opposite is the case: “Do not be afraid, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of death and Hades” (1:18).

The Role of the Lamb

A pre-existent slain Lamb plays a major role in the Book of Revelation. The Lamb appears for the first time as major player across the events associated with the opening of the seven seals (4:1-8:1). Within the liturgical setting of the heavenly court in Rev 4-5, as the question of the opening of the conclusion of Revelation is determined by an ideal vision of the city of Jerusalem, but the biblical saga begins in a God-given “garden” (“the Lord God planted a garden in Eden” [Gen 2:8]), and closes in a God-given “city” (“coming down out of heaven from God” [Rev 21:10]). This is not a summons to the dream-world of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

It could be claimed that such a view is hardly Christian. The insistence that God will finally ease the suffering and death of persecuted Christians gives too little attention to the salvific effects of the death and resurrection of Jesus now.

For a recent study of the role of the Lamb in Revelation, especially against a near-Eastern background that would have influenced first century readers, see Johns, The Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse, 40-149. As mentioned above (note 20), she locates the rhetoric of Revelation as a non-violent resistance to the Emperor cult: “The Apocalypse is a subversive resistance manual” (p. 153). For a survey of those who regard the Lamb as the “central image” that serves to control and interpret other major themes, see p. 151 note 4.
the seven seals of the scroll emerges, the pre-existent Lamb appears for the first time: “Then I saw between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered” (Rev 5:6). The twenty-four elders recognize the slain Lamb, and only he is worthy to open the seven seals (vv. 7-8). The angels surrounding the throne sing with full voice: “Worthy is the lamb that was slaughtered” (vv. 11-12). The scroll symbolizes the revelation of God. At the opening of the sixth seal, accompanied by cosmic phenomena, the great multitude that no one can count because it is so numerous proclaims that salvation belongs to God and to the pre-existent Lamb (7:9-11). The blood of the Lamb has washed clean all who have been through the great ordeal, and the slain Lamb will be their shepherd (vv. 13-17). Thus the seals climax with an indication of what God did for the Hebrew people (the former dispensation), and what was done in Jesus Christ (the establishment of the new covenant). “There was silence in heaven for about half an hour” (8:1). All creation waits for a new access to God, made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus, the slain Lamb who has unsealed the revelation of God’s design (the scroll).

27 On the throne-scene and all that accompanies it in 4:1-5:14 as a symbol of the original creation, and the establishment of cosmic order, see CORSINI, Apocalisse, 126-34; Id., Apocalypse, 125-31. The slain Lamb is not “created,” but is already “present” as God establishes cosmic order. The close, but strange, association of “standing” (ἐστάς) and “slain” (ἐσφαγμένον) in 5:6 presents the crucified and risen Christ as alive, exercising plenipotentiary authority. See also JOHNS, The Lamb Christology, 168. See also 160-161.

28 See CORSINI, Apocalisse, 135-37. JOHNS, The Lamb Christology, has an ambitious title. The section of the book devoted to an analysis of the text of Revelation (pp. 150-205) is largely based upon a study of Rev 5. From this point, on the basis of her work with near-Eastern uses of lamb-symbolism, she develops her interesting proposal of the use of the Lamb (rather than the lion) as a symbol of peaceful, but necessary resistance to the Empire. The use of the Lamb is “paradigmatic for human ethical response.”

29 The earthquake, the darkening of the sun, and other cosmic phenomena recall the Synoptic, and especially the Matthean, accounts of Jesus’ death (see Mark 15:33, 37; Matt 26:51-54; Luke 23:41-42 [somewhat muted]).

30 This “silence” is reminiscent of Jesus’ presence in Jerusalem in Mark 11:1-13:36, marking the end of one era and the beginning of another. He brings temple worship to an end (11:1-25), silences the voices of the leaders of Israel (11:26-12:44; see 12:34: “After that no one dared ask him any question”), and tells of the end of Jerusalem (13:1-23), and the end of the world (vv. 24-37). See MOLONEY, Gospel of Mark, 215-273.

31 For detail on the slain Lamb and the seven seals, culminating in the new order established by the opening of the seventh seal, see CORSINI, Apocalisse, 135-168; Id., Apocalypse,
The Lamb plays no role in the effects of the sounding of the seven trumpets (8:2-11:19), that closes by announcing the death of Jesus Christ and the results of that event: the “fulfilment of the mystery of God” (10:7). The death of the Messiah and his enthronement open the Temple, and the old economy and its cult come to an end (11:15-19). It is not an anxious suffering group of persecuted Christians that hears the message of the seventh angel that the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and his messiah (11:12), or the song of the twenty-four elders on thrones before God announcing: “We give thanks, Lord God Almighty, who are and who were, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign” (11:17).

Most of the second half of the Book of Revelation is dedicated to the pouring out of the seven bowls (15:1-22:5). But before the pouring out of the bowls begins, Rev 12:1-14:20 recapitulates and deepens what has been revealed to John the Seer to this point. This “interim section” has three parts:

12:1-17: The creation and fall of humankind.
14:1-20: The old economy as God’s first salvific intervention.

Following the ambiguity of the woman, cast down from heaven to earth, and pursued there by the ancient serpent, the role of the Lamb is restated. All who have “come to the salvation and the power and the kingdom of God” have done so because “they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb” (12:11).

---

32 The theme of the opening of the Temple at the death of Jesus is found across the Synoptic tradition (see Mark 15:38; Matt 27:51; Luke 23:45).
33 The “woman,” recalling Genesis 3 is a symbol of innocent humanity. She falls to earth, and is pursued there by the serpent, recalling Genesis 3. Pope Francis’ Marian use of Rev 12:1 in *Laudato Si’*, 241, has no place in contemporary interpretation of the passage. See above, note 2.
35 Although she does not adopt Corsini’s overall view of the Lamb and those who have come to salvation as the faithful of the first dispensation (pre-Jesus Christ), Johns, *The Lamb Christology*, 154, points out that those in view are not necessarily martyrs, but those who have resisted and remained faithful.
that was slaughtered from the foundation of the world” (13:8: AT). The Lamb and his blameless followers from the time prior to the event of Jesus Christ are “the first fruits for God and the Lamb.” They gather on Mount Zion (14:1-4). But those who have worshipped the beast (see 13:1) are punished in the presence of the Lamb (14:10).

As the pouring out of the bowls opens, those who have already conquered the beast sing a hymn in praise of God and the Lamb (15:2-4). The successive pouring out of the bowls, modelled on the plagues of Exodus (see Exod 15:1-16:21) is used to show various aspects of the one event, the death of Christ, especially judgment and condemnation of the wicked powers. As the seventh bowl is poured the accomplishment of the mystery of God in the death of Jesus is proclaimed for the third time: “It is done” (16:17). A sequence of cosmic and historical events follow the pouring out of the seventh bowl, symbolic of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Ambiguity continues, and must be defeated (17:1-22:5). False political and religious authorities continue to make war on the Lamb, but the Lamb will conquer them, because he is already established as “Lord of lords and

36 An exegetical note is called for. CORSINI, Apocalisse, 256-259; id., Apocalypse, 240-246, argues convincingly for the association of “from the foundation of the world” (apo katabolēs kosmou) with “the Lamb” in 13:8. Others would argue that the expression should be associated with “whose name has not been written.” As throughout, I am following Corsini. For the widespread reading of “whose name had not been written from the foundation of the world,” see AUNE, Revelation, 746-48; Koester, Revelation, 575. Johns, The Lamb Christology, 137-140, tends to accept that the Lamb has existed “from the foundation of the world,” and sees this as possibly related the aqedah tradition (see Gen. 22), evidenced by a parallel use of the idea in 1 Peter 1:19-20.

37 For a summary, see CORSINI, Apocalypse, 279-286. See also, on the plagues, Johns, The Lamb Christology, 131-132.

38 Although the verbs are different, this cry of the voice from the Temple as the seventh bowl is poured matches Jesus’ final word from the cross in the Gospel of John: “It is finished.” Rev 16:17 has gegonen, while John 19:30 has tetelestai. Despite the different verbs, the Gospel traditions surrounding the death of Jesus continue to play into John the Seer’s three-fold presentation of the salvific death of Christ, associated with the final seals, trumpets, and bowls. See above, notes 40-43. This position rejects the widely held claim that 4:1-18:24 reveals “the time between the present and the end,” and 19:1-22:5 describes “The end: the future victory.” See, for example, Robert A. ŠPEVEY, D. Moody SMITH, and C. Clifton BLACK, Anatomy of the New Testament. A Guide to Its Structure and Meaning (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 440.
King of Kings” (17:14). The marriage of the Lamb and the Holy Ones can take place amidst joy and celebration (19:7-9). The symbolic presentation of the old economy and its end in the death of Christ (see 19:11-14: the Word of God whose robe is dipped in his own blood) is told again in 19:11-20:15. The “thousand year reign” (20:4-6) represents the heavenly reign of the martyrs of the old economy. Ultimately, all evil authority is destroyed (20:7-15). The new Jerusalem, a bride adorned for her husband, comes down from heaven. She is the people of God, the wife of the Lamb, the city of God, with twelve gates: the twelve apostles of the Lamb. There is no need for the Temple in the new Jerusalem, as the Lord God and the Lamb dwell there: they are the divine presence. God is its light, and the Lamb is its lantern (21:22), and only those whose names are written in the book of the Lamb can enter (v. 27). The new Jerusalem, like the Lamb, already exists for believers. They are not waiting for the “end time” but living the fruits of the death and resurrection of Jesus (see 1:6). From the throne of God and the Lamb flow the waters of life, producing the fruits that nourish a people worshipping God and the Lamb in an endless day (22:1-5).

**The Slain Lamb and the agônia of the Cosmos**

Whatever one makes of the many symbols and apocalyptic visions that appear across these pages, the image of “the Lamb that was slaughtered”

---

39 The programmatic statement of the Seer in Rev 1:6 is crucial: Christ by his blood has *already* made us a kingdom of priests, serving his God and Father. See CORSINI, *Apocalisse*, 73-75; Id., *Apocalypse*, 68-71. The eschatology of Revelation is largely realised, but not totally. The Gospel of John, also dominated by a realised eschatology (see, for example, John 3:15-21; 5:21-26; 11:26), also retains a traditional end-time view (see, for example, 5:28-29; 6:39-40, 44). The closing prayer of Revelation: “Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev. 22:20) is still an imperative that speaks into the future. Corsini is especially clear on this issue in the second edition of his work (*Apocalisse*, 414-17). As throughout the New Testament, the graced presence of the “now” does not eliminate the “not yet” aspect of sacred history. Johns, *The Lamb Christology*, recognises this tension, and associates it with the liturgical elements of the document. They “proclaim and experience salvation proleptically as part of the believing community’s resistance to the empire” (p. 155. See also pp. 160-61). This is helpful, but not as convincing as Corsini’s thoroughgoing reading of the whole document as a proclamation of the saving effects of the death and resurrection of Jesus from before the foundation of the world (13:8).
(see 5:6, 7-8, 11-12; 7:13-17; 12:11; 13:8) and whose blood has touched and given life to all generations from “before the foundation of the world” (13:8), is dominant. John the Seer is not encouraging suffering Christians to persevere in hope, or to non-violent resistance to the Empire. He tells his audience that the saving death of Christ has always been present to them, from before all time. It has touched and saved all those faithful to God’s covenant within the old economy, and generates a new “city of God”: the Christian Church to which the document is addressed (see 1:1-3; 22:21).

The literary and theological process of drawing various aspects of Jesus’ person and role into pre-existence is found in a number of places in the New Testament. There are several well-known examples. The earliest is Paul’s affirmation that Christ Jesus emptied himself of “the form of God,” to take on the form of a slave (Phil 2:5-7). The post-Pauline literature develops this further, as the author of the Letter to the Colossians describes the Lord Jesus Christ as “the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation. … He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col

40 In note 2, above, I commented briefly on the shortcomings of the Encyclical from a biblical perspective. There is scarce reference to Revelation in Laudato Si’. The book is widely interpreted as a divinely sanctioned destruction of the universe, and of little help in ecological thinking. The interpretation presented here summons Christians to enjoy the life of the new earth and the new Jerusalem now. Rev 11:18, a passage closely associated with the seventh trumpet and the death and resurrection of Jesus, plays directly into the theme of Laudato Si’, if one accepts the interpretation suggested by this essay. The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord (v. 15), and the twenty-four elders sing their praise, as the time of judgment has come: “for rewarding your servants,” and “for destroying those that destroy the earth” (v. 18). At the blowing of the seventh trumpet the reign of Jesus as Messiah is already in place because of Jesus’ death and resurrection (v. 19). The image of life in the new Jerusalem, centred on the river of life-giving waters and the tree of life (22:1-5) is that of a pristine creation that gives life and healing to all creatures, because the destroyers of the earth have been destroyed (11:18). Rev 11:15-19 expresses the hope of Pope Francis. I am grateful to Professor Ian Boxall of the Catholic University of America for this suggestion.

41 Some contemporary Pauline scholars claim that being “in the form of God” (Phil 2:6) is a reference to Adam, and not to pre-existence. For a convincing exegetical and theological argument in favour of pre-existence, see Brendan Byrne, “Christ’s Pre-Existence in Pauline Soteriology,” Theological Studies 58 (1997): 308-330. See also Larry W. Hurtado, How on Earth Did Jesus Become God: Historical Questions about Earliest Devotion to Jesus (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 83-107.
1:15, 17). The author of the Letter to the Ephesians proclaims: “He chose us in him before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love” (Eph 1:4). Foundational to Johannine Christology is the intimate union between the Logos with God that pre-existed “the beginning” (John 1:1-2). During his final prayer, the Johannine Jesus prays to his Father that he might return to the glory which was his in God’s presence “before the world existed” (17:5, 24). However strange such notions may appear to us, they form an essential part of the early Church’s developing Christology.

David Aune ignores this “process” when he claims, against the possibility that Revelation 13:8 speaks of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, that: “It is logically and theologically impossible to make sense of the statement that the Lamb ‘was slaughtered before the foundation of the world.’” On the contrary, John the Seer is “logically and theologically” part of a growing tendency within the literature of the New Testament. For John the Seer, the crucified and risen one existed before all time. In typical apocalyptic fashion, the natural sequences of history have been collapsed. The reality of the slaughtered and risen lamb is constitutive of all history “from the foundation of the world” (5:6; 13:8). This early Christian insight can serve as a biblical contribution to contemporary Christian ecological and evolutionary thought: Jesus Christ, the pre-existent slain and risen Lamb, stands before all time in the heavenly court (Rev 5:6).

It has been rightly said that side-by-side with the cosmic cooperation

42 The incarnate Logos, known as “Jesus Christ” (1:14-17), is the key to the mystery of the Johannine Jesus. This theme is present across the story, but most clearly expressed in the words of the Pharisees to the man who had been born blind: “We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from” (9:29). That, of course, is the problem!

43 Aune, Revelation, 2:747.

that enables the evolutionary process, “competition, pain, and death (are) intrinsic to evolutionary processes.” Catherine Vincie poses the question sharply:

Our growing knowledge of an evolutionary cosmos complete with its explosive propensities and upheavals on a massive scale presses the theist to ask why there is such pain, predation, suffering, and death in the evolutionary process and what this says about the creator of such a World.

The power of Jesus’ death and resurrection suffuses these processes from their beginning. The evocative image of the Lamb slain and risen before the foundation of the world plays into that essential aspect of the evolutionary agōnia of the cosmos. We cannot ask the biblical Word of God for solutions to all the questions that are put to the theist by a cosmology and a contemporary scientific awareness that are totally foreign to the biblical world. The search for such solutions is the task of the theologian, hand-in-hand with the scientist. But perhaps the biblical image of the Lamb slain and risen “before the foundation of the world” (Rev 5:6; 13:8) may guide

---


46 Vincie, Worship and the New Cosmology, 48. Vincie takes this question very seriously, and on pp. 37-80 surveys a number of scholars who, among other questions, attempt to respond to the problem of the agony of the cosmos (John Haught, Denis Edwards, Arthur Peacocke, Elizabeth Johnson, Ilia Delio).

47 Revelation’s presentation of the sheer grace of Jesus’ death and resurrection “from before all time,” in a way parallel to the Pauline understanding of Jesus as the pre-existent one, equal to and image of an invisible God (Philippi and Colossians), and the Johannine understanding of the eternal union between God and the Logos, could be a significant contribution to Christian ecological thought. It is also possible that Colossians 1:15-20 links Christ as “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation” (v. 15), “through him God was pleased to reconcile all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross” (v. 20), locates the efficacy of Jesus’ death and resurrection “before all time,” although this is unlikely. See Eduard Schweizer, The Letter to the Colossians. A Commentary, trans. Andrew Chester (London, SPCK, 1976), 79-88. This thought is passingly caught in Pope Francis’ prayer at the end of Laudato Si: In addressing the Spirit he prays: “By your light you guide the world towards the Father’s love and accompany creation as it groans in travail.”
them when they come to consider the pain that is a necessary part of the evolutionary process.  

The Word of God, understood in the light of the redemptive agony of Jesus Christ, does not sidestep the agony of the universe, and of the world. Jesus’ death has been variously interpreted. Paul’s rich Theology of the Cross presents Jesus’ unconditional obedience to God that reversed the disobedience that generated sin in the world (Rom 5:12-21). But it has its roots in the bloody event that took place on Calvary (see, among many places, Phil 2:7-8). Mark the Evangelist saw the Cross as the lowest point in Jesus’ human experience, embracing the depths of all possible humiliation (Mark 15:33-39). John the Evangelist reverses this view: Jesus’ death is the high point in the revelation of God’s love (John 19:17-37).

But John the Seer locates that agony “before the foundation of the world.” The ambiguities of creation, from the beginnings of all time and space, can be washed clean by the blood of the Lamb (Rev 7:13-17). Contemporary thinkers correctly point out that the destructive Darwinian “preservation of the fittest” neglects important principles of collaboration in evolutionary processes. Nevertheless, we recognise the inevitable pain and struggle that

---

48 Most Christian theologians correctly have recourse to the unlimited love of God, manifested in the unconditional free-gift of Jesus Christ, allowing the cosmos to run its course freely. See the references to Edwards’ work in note 42, and the survey available in VINCIE, Worship and the New Cosmology, 43-80 (see note 43). EDWARDS, Jesus and the Natural World, 44, states the conundrum well: “We certainly know that we are the products of this evolutionary history and that we and all other creatures of our planet are inconceivable without this evolutionary history and all that it involves. But theology does not have any kind of full, rational answer as to why God creates in an evolutionary and emergent way. Our question stands before a God of incomprehensible mystery.” The pre-existent slain and risen Lamb may play a role in these ponderings.

49 See MOLONEY, Reading the New Testament in the Church, 55-56: “Everything is written in the light of Jesus’ death and resurrection. There is not a letter, a phrase, a sentence, a paragraph, a document, that does not come from belief that the crucified Jesus had been raised by God” (stress in original).

50 On these different interpretations of the cross, see MOLONEY, Love in the Gospel of John, 135-160.

51 See, for example, Martin A. NOWAK and Sarah COAKLEY, Evolution, Games, and God. The Principle of Cooperation (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013). In a variety of ways, this collection of studies explores how cooperation, working alongside mutation and natural selection, plays a critical role in populations from microbes to human society.
are an essential part of the ongoing story of the ecological and evolutionary processes. John the Seer suggests that part of the divine interface with that story, from “before the foundation of the world,” has been the never-ending presence of the crucified and risen one: “Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and Hades” (Rev. 1:17b-18).

It is naïve to adopt an unconditionally positive reading of science, theology, and spirituality. Our scientists tell us the evolutionary process is necessarily marked by violence and pain. The human story, and subsequent theological reflection upon it, tells the same story of violence and pain, generated by what Denis Edwards calls “the evolutionary tendencies toward insider-outsider attitudes.” John the Seer introduces the crucified into that process, bringing God’s healing, in and through his pre-existent Son, a Lamb slain before all time. “The Christian community carries the message of the Gospel of Jesus and embodies the transforming, liberating Spirit, but does this as a human community still subject to tendencies to exclude others and make them into scapegoats and enemies.” Thus, that community faces its ambiguous reality with a hope founded in an awareness that it has been cleansed by the blood of the slain Lamb since “before the foundation of the world.”

**Conclusion**

I close with some concerns over the laudable good cheer of an optimistic Pope. He is motivated by his desire to “encourage an honest and open de-
bate so that particular interests or ideologies will not prejudice the common good” (Laudato Si’, 188). He asks all peoples of good will: “Is it realistic to hope that those who are obsessed with maximizing profits will stop to reflect upon the environmental damage which they will leave for generations?” (Laudato Si’, 190). I would also claim to be born with an optimistic streak, but my response to that question must be that such a hope is unrealistic. All developed countries are dominated by anthropologies, sociologies, and economic theories that have become their spirituality, determined by their Gross Domestic Product. Productivity determines everything and drives the national ethos, cost what it may to the more fragile in the community.56 A minority group of Catholic Cardinals, Bishops, and Priests, and influential conservative Catholic intellectuals,57 reject the questioning of “maximizing profits.”

The Holy Father offers as one of his motives for hope: “The majority of people living on our planet profess to be believers” (Laudato Si’, § 201).58


56 In Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium. The Joy of the Gospel. Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013), §§ 52-60, the Holy Father had already criticised this economic theory that claims that the best way to help the poor is by means of what is called the “trickles down” effect. If the rich become richer, some of that wealth “trickles down” to the poor. Our current history of human selfishness, and the widening of the gap between the wealthy and the poor, shows that this “economic system” simply does not deliver sufficient “trickle down.”

57 This group is well represented in the USA, in the work of such figures as Michael Novak and, more recently, George Weigel. See the report “Pope’s popularity declines in US ahead of visit,” The Tablet. The International Weekly (1 August 2015): 29: “Many conservative Americans do not attribute climate change to human activity and Americans of all political stripes are reluctant to question contemporary capitalism.”

58 See also Laudato Si’, 205-208, which opens confidently: “Yet all is not lost. Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start, despite their mental and social conditioning” (§ 205).
But what does that mean in real terms? I was born and live in one of the most resource-blessed nations in the world. The bulk of its leadership, the Prime Minister, his predecessor, the Deputy Prime Minister, several leading ministers, and the Leader of the Opposition are, or were, all Catholics, educated at some of the most significant Catholic schools in the country. They are unilaterally opposed to offering any support to the thousands of refugees floating abandoned in seas to our north, without food or water. When asked if this dire situation would lead the Government to rethink its policy of “turn back the boats,” the former Prime Minister responded: “Nope, Nope, Nope.” That attitude has only hardened in what is a bi-partisan policy since then. Side-by-side with this seriously sinful attitude to our fellow-humans, Government policy supports the increase of the use of fossil fuels, which generate productivity and income, and a cut back on the less wealth-productive renewable energy sources.

Faced with complaints from the younger generation that they are being priced out of the housing market by a small number of very wealthy investors, the Federal Treasurer has advised the young to get a good job, and make more money. All of this is covered with thinly-veiled rhetoric: the need to stop the evil of people smuggling and the jobs and productivity generated by the fossil fuel industry. But few are convinced. The Australian Government wishes to protect its mining interests and control its population, in

59 See Laudato Si’, 25: “There has been a tragic rise in the number of migrants seeking to flee from the growing poverty caused by environmental degradation. They are not recognised by international conventions as refugees; they bear the loss of the lives they have left behind, without enjoying any legal protection whatsoever. Sadly, there is widespread indifference to such suffering, which is even now taking place throughout our world. Our lack of response to these tragedies involving our brothers and sisters points to the loss of that sense of responsibility for our fellow men and women upon which all civil society is founded.”

60 See Laudato Si’, 165: “We know that technology based on the use of highly polluting fossil fuels – especially coal, but also oil, and to a lesser degree, gas – needs to be progressively replaced without delay.”

61 In a Parliamentary session that introduced legislation to block public intervention over the increase of mining for fossil fuels, generated by a challenge to the immense development of the Asani Carmichael coal mine in central Queensland, the Prime Minister commented: “I regret to say, Mr Speaker, that some green groups are doing their best to sabotage jobs and investment in Australia” (The Age, Wednesday, August 19, 2015, page 1). I suspect that Pope Francis would belong to those “green groups.”
order to continue the growth of its GDP. There is a profound hiatus (the Italian distacco says it better!) between “belief” and ecological commitment. This hiatus may eventually be touched by ecological tragedy, and that will be too late, “leaving to coming generations debris, desolation, and filth” (Laudato Si’, § 161).

The Holy Father is exactly right in pointing out that the incredible design of God, long ago described in a variety of ways in the Judeo-Christian biblical tradition, has been deepened and unimaginably enriched by modern research and discoveries. We can now better understand that we are part of a wonderful universe, in which “our very bodies are made up of her elements” (Laudato Si’, § 2). He is also correct in dramatically pointing to the truth that human behaviour and human sinfulness are responsible for putting “our common home” at great risk.

In conclusion I pose a biblical question not raised by Laudato Si’. Do the environmental risks courageously addressed by Pope Francis, impacting upon our world, our relationships as peoples, nations, ethnic groups, political alliances, sexual beings, and our relationships with the whole of creation, fall under the shadow of the Lamb, slaughtered before the foundation of all

---

62 The above comments were written prior to 16 September, 2015, when the governing Liberal Party’s parliamentary representatives changed their leader. Consequently, the Prime Minister of Australia changed and a number of ministers have also changed. However, at this stage, there has been no hint of major change in the above policies, and the new Prime Minister is a Catholic.

63 The Holy Father calls it “the globalisation of indifference” (Laudato Si’, 52). This hiatus is widely reflected in both political and religious leaders (especially in the USA) greeting the publication of Laudato Si’ with the comment that the Pope should look after the problems of the Roman Catholic Church, and not world-wide, and universe-wide, ecological questions. An emeritus professor of Political Science at the Australian National University, Canberra, John Warhurst, has indicated the mood of Australians in this matter as follows: “The Catholic Church can appear to wedge many Catholic political leaders in all sorts of policies. If that really mattered, it would make life impossible for leading Catholics in politics. But it rarely does. They feel free to disagree with their spiritual leader and probably are applauded by the wider community by being free agents. It can be a bonus for them.” Warhurst refers to pontifical statements that raise political consciousness as an “unwelcome irritation.” Downloaded on June 25 from “Was Tony Abbott wedged by Pope Francis on climate change?”(www.WAtoday.com.au, June 24, 2015). I regard the current “privatisation” of a belief system that makes no impact on public performance an issue with at least the same seriousness as the contemporary ecological crisis.
time? The Christian Scriptures address the mystery of pain, death, and human failure without hesitation. The foundation of Christianity in the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, makes this necessary. They make it clear that resurrection and new life are achieved only through the process of death and burial (see 1 Cor 15:3-19). Might this not also be the case for the earth and our place in it?64 “Do not be afraid, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of death and Hades” (Rev 1:18).

There is timely wisdom in Francis’ prophetic, but optimistic, voice. Perhaps society, and especially its leaders, need to hear this clarion call. Francis writes: “The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person’s face. The ideal is to pass not only from the exterior to the interior to discover the action of God in the soul, but also to discover God in all things” (Laudato Si’, § 233). This discovery of God in all things has traditionally been seen as tracing the vestigia Dei. May this courageous, optimistic, yet prophetic intervention of Pope Francis be evidence that vestigia Dei continue to be found in the caring minds and hearts of women and men of our time?65

64 My primary concern with the above question is a reminder that Pope Francis’ desired rebirth of our endangered earth will demand pain and sacrifice from many. But it also carries the innuendo that the future of the earth as we know it is not guaranteed. A tiny speck on the fringes of our known universe, it may have arrived at a stage where only death and destruction lies ahead: the end of the earth as we know it. Such a possibility is not God’s responsibility, but the result of humankind’s abuse of God’s loving gift of unconditional freedom to those who dwell on this planet. At this stage of scientific investigation, we have no idea what has happened, is happening, and will happen, elsewhere in God’s universe. But we who dwell on the earth have no inalienable right to continue our present use and abuse of God’s gracious gifts.

65 On the notion of the “vestigia Dei” as privileged insights and experiences of the “footmark” of God’s presence in creation in the Christian tradition, see Anthony J. Kelly, An Expanding Theology. Faith in a world of Connections (Sydney: E. J. Dwyer, 1993), 157-168.