Is there an Anthropocenic Homiletic? Preaching in the midst of the Anthropocene Event

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Abstract: In geological time, the current age is often considered the Anthropocene, a designation that admits the impact of humanity on the planet. While originally deployed as a geological term, the Anthropocene concept has evolved diversely and is now widely accepted and increasingly serves as a bridging concept across disciplines, including theology. This article juxtaposes the Anthropocene "event" with the liturgical and homiletic arenas. While the Anthropocene is often judged to be a sinister moment as symbolized in the contemporary climate crisis, the larger framework of the human impact on our world and its people can be an analogy for positive human engagement and a parallel positive theological anthropology. In that vein, it is argued that the reforms of Vatican II – particularly the liturgical and homiletical developments – were driven by human concerns. Fully human engagement in worship, and by extension in the homily as an integral part of worship, suggests an "Anthropocene imperative" in Roman Catholic preaching: particularly around a positive theological anthropology and deep respect for the natural world that permeates our eucharistic liturgy. The article concludes with pastoral reflections on the preaching implications of this Anthropocene turn.

Keywords: Anthropocene • Event • Liturgy • Nature • Preaching • Theological Anthropology • Vatican II

Introduction

Since the emergence of the geological time scale in the mid-19th century, the current age[1] has been officially

[1] There are multiple frameworks for geological time, which are related but not synonymous: **Age** is a measurement of time which describes an event, such as an Ice Age: **Epoch** is the smallest unit of geological time, which lasts several million years; **Period** is the basic unit of geological time. A period lasts tens of millions of years, which is the time it takes to form one type of rock system; **Era** is composed of two or more periods. One era is hundreds of millions of years in

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designated as the Holocene age. The term is rooted in the work of the Scottish geologist Charles Lyell who in 1833 described the current period as one "tenanted by man,"[2] covering approximately the past 11,700 years of the planet earth; we now recognize that humans existed much longer than this.[3] Lyell's original term for this tenanted period was the "recent age." Even previous to Lyell – particularly from the onset of industrialization – scientists recognized that "the entire face of the Earth bears the imprint of human powers."[4] That impact is now understood to stretch back millennia: human environmental impact dates back to the Paleolithic (about 2.58 million to 11,700 years ago) and subsequent Neolithic ages (from about 12,000 to 6500 years ago).[5]

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duration; **(A)Eon** is composed of two or more eras. This is the largest division of time, lasting hundreds of millions of years https://worldtreasures.org/assets/uploads/documents/Geologic_Time_Periods.pdf. The United States Geological Survey (USGS) do not hold that we are in an Anthropocene epoch, but rather that the Anthropocene is an ongoing geological event https://www.usgs.gov/publications/anthropocene-event-not-epoch. Thus, for the sake of accuracy, we will first employ the language of "Anthropocene Age" in this article as the appropriate geological designation of this moment.

[2] Charles Lyell, *Principles of Geology,* vol. 3 (London: John Murray, 1833), 52.

[3] Possibly as early as 315,000 years ago, cf. Jean-Jacques Hublin, A. Ben-Ncer, S. Bailey, *et al.* "New fossils from Jebel Irhoud, Morocco and the pan-African origin of *Homo sapiens,*" *Nature* 546 (2017): 289–292, https://doi.org/10.1038/nature22336

[4] Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon, *Histoire naturelle générale et particulière, Supplement 5: Des époques de la nature* (Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1778), 237 as cited in Helmuth Trischler, "The Anthropocene: A Challenge for the History of Science, Technology, and the Environment," *NTM Zeitschrift für die Geschichte der Wissenschaften, Technik und Umwelt* 24 (2016): 309-335, online at https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00048-016-0146-3. Much of the early history here is derived from the Trischler article.

[5] Wolfgang Nentwig, "Human Environmental Impact in the Paleolithic and Neolithic," in *Handbook of Paleoanthropology* III, ed.

In 1867 Paul Gervaise appears to be the first to employ the designation "holocene" for this age.[6] It entered the global lexicon during the Second International Geological Congress in 1885 convening in Bologna. Next a "Holocenian Stage" was formally proposed at the Third International Geological Congress in Berlin in 1885,[7] and in 1968 the term was officially accepted by the Geological Names Committee of the U.S. Geological Survey to replace "recent" as the proper designation of this age.[8] Other terms for this emerging age abounded. In 1873 the Italian geologist Antonio Stoppani proposed that it should be labeled "Anthropozoic."[9] In 1922 the Russian geologist Alexei Pavlov coined the term "Anthropogene" for this geological moment. Other monikers for this age have alternatively emerged as the "Atomic Age," the "Technogene" age, the "Ecozoic" age, and American journalist Andrew Revkin's 1992 proposal of an Anthrocene" age.[10]

The term "Anthropocene" was first used by limnologist Eugene Stoermer in the 1980s. Independently, Nobel laureate Paul Crutzen deployed the term and more than Stoermer was the source of its popularization. At a 2000 conference of the International

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Winfried Henke and Ian Tattersall (Berlin: Springer, 2015), 1881-1900

[6] Paul Gervaise, *Zoologie et Paléontologie Générales,* 2 vols. (Paris: Bertrand, 1867-1869), I:32.

[7] Mike Walker et al., "Formal Ratification of the Subdivision of the Holocene Series/Epoch (Quaternary System/Period)," *Journal of the Geological Society of India* 93 (2019): 135-141, https://doi.org/10.18814/epiiugs/2018/018016

[8] George V. Cohee, "Holocene Replaces Recent in Nomenclature Usage of the U.S. Geological Survey," *AAPG Bulletin* 52:5 (1968): 852, https://doi.org/10.1306/5D25C467-16C1-11D7-8645000102C1865D

[9] Valenti Rull, "The 'Anthropocene': neglects, misconceptions, and possible futures," *EMBO Reports* 18:7 (2017): 1056-1060, doi: https://doi.org/10.15252%2Fembr.201744231

[10] Ibid.

Geosphere-Biosphere Programme in Cuernavaca, Mexico—tired of hearing the Holocene mentioned as the current geological epoch—Crutzen spontaneously shouted that we are living in the Anthropocene.[11] The cocreation of this term is affirmed by the joint authorship by Stoermer and Crutzen of an article in the *Global Change Newsletter* in 2000.[12] This modest two-page publication in an internal newsletter demonstrated that these two scientists had little understanding of the impact of this taxological evolution or they might have shaped a more comprehensive article for publication in a high profile scientific journal.

While originally deployed as a geological term, the Anthropocene concept has "evolved diversely [and] is now widely accepted, and increasingly serves as a bridging concept across disciplines and beyond."[13] An early mapping of publications employing this term in the title, abstract or text body, indicates that – although the disciplines of earth and environmental sciences have contributed the most published items (64%) – the humanities and social sciences make up 24% of these publications.

While such literature searches have not explicitly looked for the conjunction of the Anthropocene and theology, that connection is clearly underway. A recent search of religious databases employing EBSCO yielded over 1400 such entries, with almost 600 qualifying as

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[11] Nicola Davison, "The Anthropocene epoch: Have we entered a new phase of planetary history?," *The Guardian* (30 May 2019), https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/may/30/anthropocene-epoch-have-we-entered-a-new-phase-of-planetary-history

[12] Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer, "The 'Anthropocene'," *Global Change Newsletter* 41 (2000): 17-18.

[13] Eduardo Brondizio, "Re-conceptualizing the Anthropocene: A call for Collaboration," *Global Environmental Change* 39 (2016): 318-327, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2016.02.006; much of this paragraph relies on this source.

"peer reviewed." While many of these entries fall under the broad category of eco-theology, they also range across other theological disciplines from theological anthropology to spirituality, from biblical studies to ethics.[14] There are also conferences being staged on the intersection of theology and the Anthropocene,[15] as well

[14] A sampling of such publications over the past decade includes: Ernest L. Simmons, "Theology in the Anthropocene," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 53, no. 4 (14 December 2014), 10.1111/dial.12125; Johann-Albrecht Meylahn, "Doing Public Theology in the Anthropocene towards Life-Creating Theology," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 36, no. 3 (September 2015): 1–10; Forrest Clingerman, "Place and the Hermeneutics of the Anthropocene," *Worldviews* 20, no.3 (2016): 225–37; Celia Deane-Drummond et al., *Religion in the Anthropocene* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2017); A.J. Roberts, "Intersubjectivity in the Anthropocene: Toward an Earthbound Theology," *Open Theology* 4 (2018): 71-83; Sigurd Bergmann, "Theology in the Anthropocene – and Beyond?," in *Contextual Theology: Skills and Practices of Liberating Faith*, ed. Sigurd Bergmann and Mika Vähäkangas (London: Routledge, 2020), 160-180; Eva van Urk, "Public Theology and the Anthropocene: Exploring Human-Animal Relations," *International Journal of Public Theology* 14, no. 2 (7 July 2020): 206-223; Dianne Rayson, *Bonhoeffer and Climate Change Theology and Ethics for the Anthropocene* (Lanham MD: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2021); Ryan LaMothe, *A Radical Political Theology for the Anthropocene Age: Thinking and Being Otherwise* (Portland: Cascade Books, 2021); Ernst M. Conradie, "Some Reflections on Human Identity in the Anthropocene." *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 77, no. 3 (July 1, 2021): e1–9; Peter Walker and Jonathan Cole, ed., *Theology on a Defiant Earth: Seeking Hope in the Anthropocene* (Washington DC: Roman & Littlefield, 2022); Jan-Olav Henricksen, *Theological Anthropology in the Anthropocene: Reconsidering Human Agency and its Limits* (Berlin: Springer, 2023).

[15] Previous to the International Academy of Practical Theology's 2023 conference on the theme in Seoul, Korea, there was the "Online International Conference – theology in the Anthropocene [15-17 July 2021]," sponsored by the University of Bonn, Department of Old Catholic Studies and the European Research Network, https://anthropocene.ts-tr.eu/?page_id=59

as graduate courses on this conjunction.[16]

Liturgical Reform, the new Homiletic and the Anthropocene

When placing the Anthropocene in dialogue with the liturgical and homiletic arenas, a definitional distinction offered by the United States Geological Survey is particularly useful:

> Over the course of the last decade the concept of the Anthropocene has become widely established within and beyond the geoscientific literature but its boundaries remain undefined. Formal definition of the Anthropocene as a chrono-stratigraphical series and geochronological epoch following the Holocene, at a fixed horizon and with a precise global start date, has been proposed, but fails to account for the diachronic nature of human impacts on global environmental systems during the late Quaternary. By contrast, defining the Anthropocene as an ongoing geological event more closely reflects the reality of both historical and ongoing human–environment interactions, encapsulating spatial and temporal heterogeneity, as well as diverse social and environmental processes that characterize anthropogenic global changes. Thus, an Anthropocene Event incorporates a substantially wider range of anthropogenic environmental and cultural effects, while at the same time applying more readily in different academic contexts than would be the case with a rigidly defined Anthropocene Series/Epoch.[17]

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[16] E.g., that by the Divinity Faculty of the University of Cambridge, "Facing the Environmental Future: Theology in the Anthropocene," https://www.divinity.cam.ac.uk/study-here/mphil/Philosophyofreligion/facing-the-environmental-future-theology-in-the-anthropocene

[17] See note above.

Imaging the Anthropocene as an "event" is useful when relating it to worship and its preaching. In my Roman Catholic tradition, recent dogmatic definitions of the liturgy have stressed its dynamic and active character.[18] While folk easily equate sacraments and their liturgies with a book or a teaching, a consecrated host or a cup of wine, liturgy is first and foremost a verb. David Power famously christened liturgy as an "eventing" of God's grace and human response in verbal and nonverbal languages within a given historical continuum in space and time.[19]

There is even greater ease in understanding the liturgical homily as an event.[20] The performative nature of the homily is not only underscored by the avalanche of literature and digital sources that provide advice for delivering a sermon, but also the magisterial theologizing of no less than Pope Francis. In his apostolic exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis alternately considers the homily an intense and happy experience of the Spirit (no. 136), a consoling encounter with God's word (no. 136), a proclamation (no. 138), a dialogue between God and his people (no. 138), like a mother's conversation (no. 140), a communication of beauty (no. 143), an act of enlightenment (no. 144), and a constituent aspect of the Church's larger call to mission and evangelization (no.

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[18] The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* makes this clear when it teaches "that every liturgical celebration, because it is an action of Christ the priest and of his body, which is the church, is a preeminently sacred action. No other action of the church equals its effectiveness by the same title nor to the same degree." *Sacrosanctum concilium,* no. 7 https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html

[19] David Power, *Sacrament: the Language of God's Giving* (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 51ff.

[20] See, in particular, the "event" language in the *General Instruction to the Revised Lectionary,* e.g., no. 3.

20). He instructs that we should not only be concerned about the content of a homily, but that the "concern for the way we preach is … a profoundly spiritual concern" (no. 157).[21]

The Anthropocene event is defined not only by the human impact on our physical and social environments but also the growing awareness of that impact. It is only recently that scientists have come to reckon with the impact of hominin evolution on not only the eradication of large-bodies species[22] but also the extinction of megafauna[23] tens of thousands of years ago. Consequently, part of the Anthropocene phenomenon appears to be self-reflection on the human impact on our physical and social environments. This is probably why, even though

> debates are continuing about whether the evidence from the fossil record is sufficient to warrant the conclusion that the Earth has now left the interglacial state called the Holocene and entered a new era, the Anthropocene has already become embedded in public discourse as a way of capturing a significant shift in human-Earth relations and human self-understanding.[24]

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[21] https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html

[22] Felisa Smith, "Body size downgrading of mammals over the late Quaternary," *Science* 360:6368 (2018) 310-313, https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.aao5987

[23] Christopher Sandom et al., "Global Late Quaternary megafauna extinctions linked to humans, not climate change," *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 281:2013325420133254 http://doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2013.3254

[24] Maria Antonaccio, "De-moralizing and re-moralizing the Anthropocene," in Celia Deane-Drummond et al., *Religion in the Anthropocene* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2017), 121.

The Anthropocene is not simply an age of human impact on the earth, but also an age of awareness about the effects of the human footprint on our environment. Analogously the current "liturgical age" in my tradition is not simply one of reform or retrenchment. Rather, it is one whose reform and/or retrenchment – at least in part – has been triggered by the growing awareness of the "human footprint" in worship and the battalions of enthusiasts or detractors who applaud or reject what might be considered the humanization of the liturgy.

There is no worship free from hominin fingerprints. It is true that other species ritualize. For example, elephants not only appear to mourn their dead, but return to the death sites and caress the remains of their species.[25] It is only hominins, however, that almost 240,000 years ago engaged in burial practices of their dead that included grave goods pointing to possible beliefs in rebirth or afterlife.[26] Some even argue that material evidence suggests that Neanderthals had spiritual stirrings that contributed to their own burial rituals.[27] Whenever and wherever "human rituals" and their ensuing "beliefs" emerged, they were by definition human artifacts.

Since all theology by its very nature is contextual theology,[28] so must all worship – Christian or otherwise

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[25] Shaoni Bhattacharya, "'Elephants may pay homage to dead relatives," *Biology Letters* 2:2 (2005) 26-28, doi:10.1098/rsbl.2005.0400

[26] Will Sullivan, "Ancient human relatives may have buried their dead," *Smithsonian Magazine* (7 June 2023) https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/ancient-human-relatives-may-have-buried-their-dead-180982308/

[27] Ruth Schuste, "Neanderthals turned to faith when confronting death, new evidence suggests," *Haaretz* (2016) https://www.haaretz.com/archaeology/2016-12-15/ty-article/did-neanderthals-believe-in-god/0000017f-deea-d3a5-af7f-feeec3e70000

[28] Stephen Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 2002), 3.

–be similarly contextual. However, just as the scientific awareness of the human impact on our physical environment lags millennia after that impact began, so the theological and liturgical awareness of the human impact on Christian worship patterns and accompanying preaching only emerged millennia after the impact began, i.e., at its origin. Our acknowledgement of that imprint is relatively recent. One stark example suffices: it took Christian scholars well into the late 2nd millennium to reckon with the Jewishness of Jesus and the consequences of his socio-religious location upon emerging Christianity and its worship forms.[29] Previous to this, it is not an understatement to propose that the historical Jesus was "de-Judaized."[30]

The reforms of the Second Vatican Council were driven by human concerns. While framed theologically, this motivation is explicated in vividly experiential terms in the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, which notes: "in the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy, this full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else."[31] Proposing the need for human engagement that is both active and fully conscious and placing that need at the center of universal liturgical reform is unprecedented in the history of Roman Catholicism. Across the globe it sparked the rapid and radical reshaping of Roman Catholic worship.

Preaching was also deeply influenced by this insistence on intelligible human engagement. The theological reasoning undergirding this accessibility move was the insistence that the assembly – with Christ

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[29] One of the first serious works exploring the Jewish roots of Christian worship was Louis Bouyer's *Eucharistie: Théologie et spiritualité de la prière eucharistique* (Paris: Desclée, 1966).

[30] Zev Garber and Kenneth Hanson, *Judaism and Jesus* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020), vii.

[31] *The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy,* no. 14.

and at his initiative – was actually a subject of worship.[32] It is Christ head and members who offer the eucharist. Similarly, since the homily was imagined by Vatican II as an integral part of the liturgy,[33] it also had to be an action of Christ head and members. Theologically this means that the assembly is not an "object" of a preacher's homily but must be an integrated subject in that event.

While the Roman Catholic Church promoted this theology, leading Protestant homileticians provided the strategies for most effectively honoring the assembly as a homiletic subject. Fred Craddock is often credited with inaugurating a "Copernican revolution in homiletics"[34] with his 1971 publication *As One without Authority.*[35] In that work, Craddock introduced an inductive preaching method that places people at the center of the preaching event and allows them to draw their own conclusions. Craddock's revolutionary ideas ushered in what is sometimes called the "new homiletic." This approach created a decidedly weightier human footprint in the pulpit. In this homiletic turn to the subject the assembly in a very real sense is invited into the preaching act. This requires not only taking their sensitivities and prejudices, theologies and political perspectives seriously, but also dictates structuring a homily in such a way that the preaching becomes a shared journey of discovery and encounter by homilist and assembly together, rather than a delivery system for feeding the assembly a preacher's precooked conclusions.[36]

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[32] *The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy,* no. 7.

[33] *The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy,* no. 52.

[34] R. L. Eslinger, *A New Hearing: Living Options in Homiletic Method* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), 65.

[35] Fred B. Craddock, *As One without Authority,* 4th rev. ed. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005).

[36] See, for example, Eugene Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1980).

Anthropocenic Preaching as a Homiletic Imperative

The reforms of Vatican II have introduced an Anthropocenic imperative into Roman Catholic Worship. This imperative not only insists upon a human "footprint" regarding both the design and performance of liturgy but it also requires that there is a fully human liturgical engagement of the masses that is decidedly self-reflective. As in wider discourse the Anthropocene turn reckons with human beings as "geological agents," so in late 20th century liturgical reforms the baptized are now reckoned as "liturgical agents." While ancient traditions and doctrinal orthodoxy remain important foundations for the ongoing liturgical reform, Vatican II upheld neither of these (nor their many corollaries) as the first validity test for reformed worship. Rather, it is the intentional reception of and the implicit affirmation of worship by the baptized through their participation that is to be considered before all else. The implications of this Anthropocenic imperative in worship and its preaching are multiple. Two in particular will be addressed here: theological anthropology and respect for the natural world.

Theological Anthropology

While anthropology ponders what it means to be human, theological anthropology introduces God into that mix, asking: What does it mean to be human in the presence of God?[37] There is no consensus when answering this question. Responses range widely from that of John Calvin who held that by nature human beings are not

[37] A useful introduction to the breadth this topic from a Roman Catholic perspective is Mary Ann Hinsdale and Stephen Okey, eds., *T & T Handbook of Theological anthropology* (New York: T & T Clark, 2023).

inclined to the love of God but first their own interests,[38] to Karl Rahner who believed that all humans are radically open to God's self-communication.[39] Besides the writings of theologians or magisterial teachings our rituals as well as the legislation and processes directing their reform are similarly embedded with underlying theological anthropologies.[40] Some label this phenomenon a "liturgical anthropology."[41] Since Roman Catholic worship is a patchwork of ancient and new materials, these rites offer mixed messages about their embedded theological anthropologies.[42] At the same time, employing Paul Gilroy's useful frame of "flow,"[43] one could argue that there are dominant anthropological flows in the design and performance of the 1969 reformed eucharistic worship. This is well illustrated when comparing it to the 1570 rite.

There are few studies examining the theological anthropologies embedded in Roman Catholic Worship. One exception is Benedikt Kanemann's apologetic for

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[38] See the second book of his *Institutes,* Chapter 1, https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes/institutes.iv.ii.html

[39] Karl Rahner, *Hearers of the Word* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969).

[40] A recent example of such an exploration is Wilfried Engemann, "How People Are Treated During Worship: Problems of an Implicit Liturgical Anthropology," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 21/2 (2017): 259-280, https://doi.org/10.1515/ijpt-2016-0050; also, Benedikt Kranemann, "Anthropologische Spurensuche in der Liturgie," *Heiliger Dienst* 74, no. 3 (2020): 170-177.

[41] See, for example, Joshua Cockayne and Gideon Salter, "Liturgical Anthropology: A Developmental Perspective," *TheoLogica: An International Journal for Philosophy of Religion and Philosophical Theology* 6, no. 1 (2022), doi: https://doi.org/10.14428/thl.v6i1.61193

[42] Benedikt Kranemann, "Anthropologische Spurensuche in der Liturgie," *Heiliger Dienst* 74, no. 3 (2020): 172.

[43] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 16 *et passim*.

studying the anthropology of our worship.[44] Most of Kanemann's references, however, do not allude to the Mass but to baptisms, weddings, and funerals instead. There are virtually no serious studies examining the theological anthropologies alternately undergirding the 1570 and 1969 *Missale Romanum*.[45] Nonetheless, one academically as well as experientially familiar with both could credibly posit that the texts and rubrics of the 1570 Missal of Pius V reflects a dominant flow in its theological anthropology that highlight the sinfulness and unworthiness of both priest and assembly.

The Rite of 1570: The sinfulness of the priest in this rite was accentuated by the many personal deprecatory prayers (*apologiae*) he was required to recite during Mass.[46] The opening prayer of the Offertory well illustrates this:

Suscipe, sancta Pater omnipotens aeterne Deus, hanc immaculatam hostiam, quem ego indignus famulus tuus offero tibi, Deo meo vivo et vero, pro innumerabilibus peccatis, et offensionibus, et negligentiis meis, et pro	Accept, O holy Father, almighty and eternal God, this spotless host, which I your unworthy servant, offer to you, my living and true God, for my own countless sins, trans-gressions and failings; for

[44] Kranemann, "Anthropologische Spurensuche in der Liturgie."

[45] One exception here is Lauren Prista's study of collects. While I do not agree with her extensive criticism of the process and resulting prayers in the reformed rite, she does note that the reformed rites do reflect a different theological anthropology, e.g., in her study of the collect for the Second Sunday of Advent, *Collects of the Roman Missals: A comparative Study of the Sundays in Proper Seasons before and after the Second Vatican Council* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 46.

[46] See Joanne Pierce's discussion of sacerdotal apologiae in her "The Evolution of the *Ordo Missae* in the Early Middle Ages," in *Medieval Liturgy: A Book of Essays,* ed. Lizette Larson-Miller (New York-London: Garland Publishing, 1997), 3-24.

omnibus circumstantibus, sed et pro omnibus fidelibus christianis vivis atque defunctis: ut mihi, et illis proficiat ad salute in vitam aeternam. Amen.	all here present and for all faithful Christians, living and dead: that it may avail both me and them unto salvation in everlasting life. Amen.

This vision of unworthiness was amplified by various moral theologians who enumerated the multiple ways a priest could commit serious sin when celebrating Mass.[47] Such positions were broadly based on the instruction *De Defectibus in Celebratione Missarum Occurentibus* printed as part of the introductory materials to the *Missale Romanum* of 1570.[48]

The priest as unworthy supplicant is a recurring theme in the many private deprecatory prayers that mark this Eucharistic rite. Thus, before Communion, the priest privately prays:

Perceptio Corporis tui, Domine Jesu Christe, quod ego indignus sumere praesumo, non mihi proveniat in judicium et condemnationem: sed pro tue pietate prosit mihi ad tutamentum mentis et corporis, et ad medelam percipiendam …	Let not the partaking of your body, O Lord Jesus Christ, which I though unworthy, presume to receive, turn to my judgment and condemnation: but through your goodness may it be for me a safeguard and a healing remedy both of soul and body …

[47] See, for example, Alphonsus de Liguori, "The Celebration of Mass," in *The Complete Works: Vol. XII Dignities and duties of the Priest,* ed. Eugene Grimm (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1889), 208-229, https://archive.org/details/alphonsusworks12liguuoft/page/n3/mode/2up

[48] https://media.musicasacra.com/pdf/romanmissal_classical.pdf

Another potent indicator of the underlying theological anthropology here is the dominant place of intercession throughout the rite. The priest and the people, for whom he offers the Mass, are clearly cast in the mode of petitioners. While this supplicant posture is already exemplified by the previously quoted prayer, deeply symbolic of this stance are the opening lines of the Roman Canon:

Te igitur, clementissime Pater, per Jesum Christum Filium tuum Dominum nostrum, supplices rogamus, ac petimus, uti accepta habeas, et benedicas, haec dona, haec munera, haec sancta sacrifice illibata.	Most merciful Father we humbly pray and beseech you, through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, that you will be pleased to receive and bless these gifts, these offerings, these holy unblemished sacrifices.

As David Power assesses this prayer, once the opening (*Sanctus*) praise was over, "the priest was occupied with intercessions and offerings."[49]

As for the faithful, their lot is similar to that of the priest: unworthy supplicants and cautious petitioners, under a cloud of impending judgment, needing the protection of the saints. While the Canon of the 1570 rite does refer to "your holy Catholic Church" (*Ecclesia tua sancta catholica*) and God's whole family (*cunctae familiae*), references to the baptized are more often couched in language of servants (*famula*). This assessment is epitomized at the beginning of the invocation of the saints during the Canon when the priest prays:

[49] David Power, "Theology of the Latin Text and Rite," in *A Commentary on the Order of Mass of the Roman Missal*, ed. Edward Foley et al. (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2011), 259.

Nobis quoque peccatoribus famulis tuis, de multitudine miserationum tuarum sperantibus, partem aliquem et societatum donare digneris …	To us also, your sinful servants, who hope in the multitude of your mercies, vouchsafe to grant some and fellowship …

That text ritually summarizes the church's stance towards the baptized since the early Middle Ages when their self-perception as sinners was so pervasive and their subsequent absence from communion so prevalent that a Church council mandated their confession and communion at least once a year.[50] The assessment of Eamon Duffy is pertinent: writing of late medieval Christianity, he suggests that most Christians hoped for salvation, but thought that only saints went to heaven directly. Consequently, it was purgatory rather than hell that became the focus of Christian fear.[51]

The design and performance of the 1570 eucharistic rite perpetuated the perception of the assembly as a gathering of sinners by reducing the presence of the usually kneeling baptized to an incidental and ritually unnecessary presence. Even if there existed a *schola* that chanted an *introit* or *Gloria*, the rubrics required the priest to recite those texts himself for liceity. In the absence of any acolyte or server, the priest could simply speak all of the responses. This was a relatively widespread practice in my own religious community before Vatican II. While there existed medieval legislation aimed at preventing any such *missa solitaria,* the presence of another was not so much because of their individual value or personal benefit derived from the

[50] Lateran IV, Canon 21 https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/lateran4.asp

[51] Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 1992), 341.

ritual but to safeguard the "social, plural character which is so distinctively revealed in the liturgy."[52]

Despite the 1903 call of Pope Pius X for the active participation of the faithful in the "sacred mysteries and in the public and solemn prayer of the Church,"[53] the assembly was ordinarily treated as "mute spectators." This is confirmed in the 1928 Apostolic Constitution *Divini cultus,* which explicitly instructs against this practice.[54] It is true that the "dialogue Mass" (*Missa recitata*) – famously celebrated by the monks of Maria Laach in 1921[55] – was emerging in the early 20th century. It was not until 1922, however, that the Sacred Congregation of Rites canonically confirmed in a *dubium* issued with multiple cautions[56] that local bishops could

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[52] Joseph Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite,* trans. Francis Brunner (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1950), I:226; on the following pages Jungmann explores further legislation, especially around the emerging role of the server; also see, Thomas P. Rausch, "Is the Private Mass Traditional?" *Worship* 64 (1990): 237-242.

[53] *Tra le sollecitudini,* introduction, https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-x/es/motu_proprio/documents/hf_p-x_motu-proprio_19031122_sollecitudini.html

[54] "It is absolutely necessary that the faithful do not attend sacred functions as strangers or silent spectators but, truly understood by the beauty of the liturgy, participate in sacred ceremonies - even in solemn processions where the clergy and pious associations take part - in such a way as to alternate, according to the due norms, their voice to those of the priest and the *schola*. If what is hoped for will occur, it will no longer happen that the people do not respond at all or respond only with a low murmur to the common prayers proposed in the liturgical language or in the vernacular." *Divini Cultus,* no. ix https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/it/bulls/documents/hf_p-xi_bulls_19281220_divini-cultus.html

[55] Keith Pecklers, *The Unread Vision* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998), 6-7.

[56] Congregatio Sacrorum Rituum, rescript 4375 (4 August 1922), in *Decreta Authentica Congregationis Sacrorum Rituum* (Romae: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1927), appendix II:37, https://cdn.restorethe54.com/media/pdf/decrees-of-the-sacred-congregation-of-rites-part-6-1898.pdf

implement this Dialog Mass. Linguistic confirmation of the erased voice of the faithful is that the entire eucharistic liturgy was offered in the first person singular by the priest.[57]

Together, these textual and ritual parameters of the 1570 rite reveal dominant flows that, rather than lifting up and celebrating, dispraise and even ignore the baptized. In parallel ways, they present an image of the priest who – though at the very center of worship – is equally unworthy and sinful.

The Rite of 1969: Similar to the *Missale Romanum* of 1570, the 1969 *Novus Ordo* of Paul VI is a patchwork construction with multiple theological currents coursing through its rubrics and texts. Nonetheless, the dominant flow through this revision projects a more positive theological anthropology than its predecessor. This is reflective of the documents of Vatican II that generally avoided the negative and juridical language that marked previous councils. Instead, according to John O'Malley, the "style" of Vatican II's documents reflected in its language is distinctive and new: a remarkable shift from judgmental and condemnatory church-speak to a pastoral lexicon of people of God, friendship, cooperation, dialogue, collegiality and holiness.[58] O'Malley contends that these linguistic shifts, threading through all of the Council's documents, indicate a dramatic transformation of a way of being church: from one ready to castigate the world and its inhabitants to being in dialogue with them. Style is a key hermeneutic to the Council and its ritual aftermath.

In the 1969 rite it is difficult to predicate any distinctive theological anthropology of the priest-presider

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[57] Cf. the prayer "*ego indignus famulus tuus offero*" cited above.

[58] John O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 306 *et passim*.

apart from that of the assembly, as this rite makes him one with the assembly in the eucharistic action. Most conspicuous may be the elimination of the vast majority of his private deprecatory prayers.[59]

Another prominent change affecting the status of both priest and people, is the rise of thanksgiving as a dominant prayer mode, counterpointing the more traditional emphasis on petition and offering. In comparison to the previously cited 1570 Offertory prayer, the opening of the 1969 Preparation of the Gifts is completely devoid of petition; instead, it is a prayer of praise and blessing.

Benedictus es, Domine, Deus universi, quia de tua largitate accepimus panem, quem tibi offerimus, fructum terrae et operis manuum hominum, ex quo nobis fiet panis vitae.	Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received the bread we offer you: fruit of the earth and work of human hands, it will become for us the bread of life.

Structurally this prayer no longer sits in an extended "Offertory Rite" but rather in the ritually very modest "Preparation of the Gifts and Table." The essential element of the "offertory" has not been eliminated, but has been greatly reduced, wed to the memorial of Christ's death and resurrection (*anamnesis*) and moved into the Eucharistic Prayer.[60] This further reduces this ordo's emphasis on "offering." This diminished emphasis on intercession and offering is supplanted by modes of

[59] The two that remain are a very abbreviated private prayer at the washing of his hands during the preparation of the gifts (reduced from 7 verses of Psalm 25 to 1).

[60] *The General Instruction of the Roman Missal,* no. 79, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20030317_ordinamento-messale_en.html

praise and thanksgiving, transforming the image of assembly and priest from unworthy penitents to a people who find their dignity in acts of praise and thanksgiving.

In Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church the dignity of the people of God is remarkably considered even before that of the hierarchy.[61] Furthermore, this document recognizes that instead of a company of sinners, the whole of the people of God are called to holiness, and that this Holy People of God – sharing in Christ's prophetic office – are led by the Holy Spirit who enriches them with divine virtues.[62] This magisterial shift towards a more positive theological anthropology regarding the baptized finds sustained resonance in the 1969 *Novus Ordo.*

For example, the eucharistic rite is no longer structured as a "public private Mass" in which the priest is the sole critical actor. Rather, the *Novus Ordo* is decidedly a "we" event in language and rubrics. A lector reads a lection, which the priest does not have to repeat for validity. A cantor chants a responsorial psalm, which similarly does not require clerical duplication. That this is no longer a "public private Mass" is underscored by the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal,* which considers the different forms of celebration in this order: 1) Mass with a Congregation (nos. 115-198), 2) Concelebrated Mass (nos. 199-251), and only then 3) Mass without a Congregation (nos. 152-172).[63]

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[61] Chapter II, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html

[62] Ibid., nos. 39 and 12 respectively.

[63] Regarding the latter, Mass without a Congregation is not a solo event, and the instruction presumes that there is minister present to assist and make the responses (no. 209). The Instruction further notes that Mass should not be celebrated without at least one other person present "except for a just and reasonable cause" (no. 254), i.e.,

As for language, the most important indicator of a more positive theological anthropology is the turn to the vernacular. While Latin remains the official language of the rite,[64] O'Malley noted that within a few years of Vatican II, the Mass in its entirety was being celebrated in the vernacular worldwide.[65] This affirms not only the importance of the baptized as subjects in the worship, but also implicitly affirms their linguistic-cultural context as valuable and worthy of being employed in worship.

A second major language change that signals a more positive theological anthropology is the turn from the "I" language to "we" language that honors the assembly as subjects in the liturgical action. The prayer at the Preparation of the Gifts cited above illustrates this shift. There are no first-person singular pronouns or verbs in that text but only three first-person plural nouns and verbs (*accepimus, offerimus, nobis*). By contrast, the 1570 text has three first-person singular pronouns and verbs and does not refer to the assembly as "us" (*nobis*) but rather as "them" (*illis*).

The previously referenced *Nobis quoque peccatoribus* is retained as part of the Roman Canon (now called Eucharistic Prayer I) in the new *Missale Romanum*. Its inclusion underscores the patchwork theologies flowing through this collection of prayers and rubrics. On the other hand, this phrase finds little resonance in the other three Eucharistic prayers promulgated in the Missal of 1969, nor in subsequently approved eucharistic prayers such as those for Reconciliation, Children, and Various Needs and Occasions. Instead, it finds this counterpoint during the anamnesis and offering of Eucharistic Prayer II:

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something beyond the personal preference or devotion of the priest. Chapter IV: The Different Forms of Celebrating Mass.

[64] *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy,* no. 36.

[65] O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II,* 140.

Memores igitur mortis et resurrectionis eius, tibi, Domine, panem vitae et calicem salutis offerimus, gratias agentes quia nos dignos habuisti adstare coram te et tibi ministrare.	Therefore, as we celebrate the memorial of his Death and Resurrection, we offer you, Lord the Bread of life and the Chalice of salvation, giving thanks that you have held us worthy to [stand][66] in your presence and minister to you.[67]

Aside from retaining the Old Roman Canon's *Nobis quoque peccatoribus,* the Missal of 1969 does speak of people's sinfulness but richly couches such in the mercy and faithfulness of God, as in the preface for the Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation I:

Qui ad abundantiorem vitam habendam nos incitare non desinis, et, cum sis dives in misericordia, veniam offerre perseveres ac peccatores invitas ad tuae solum indulgentiae fidendum.	For you do not cease to spur us on to possess a more abundant life and, being rich in mercy, you constantly offer pardon and call on sinners to trust in your forgiveness alone.

While there are innumerable other examples, these suffice to illustrate the shift in theological anthropology from the 1570 to the 1969 rite. Admittedly, there are multiple flows through the texts and rubrics of the latter and there is still a recognition that priest and assembly are sinners. At the same time, the reformed rite more clearly raises up the dignity of the baptized who remain beloved of God, even when they do sin, and weds them

[66] While the official translation has "to be in your presence," *astare* is properly translated as "to stand."

[67] The Latin and English texts from the 1969 Missal can easily be found in *A Commentary on the Order of Mass of the Roman Missal*, ed. Edward Foley et al.

inextricably to the actions and dignity of the priest-presider.

Preaching implications

In "The Joy of the Gospel" Pope Francis offers an extended excursus on the homily deeply rooted in the reforms of Vatican II. This exhortation displays a distinctively positive theological anthropology.[68] Francis' instructions on preaching not only presume this affirming turn but provide useful directives for homilizing in that mode, resonant with the theological shifts of the 1969 *Missale Romanum*. Francis' work provides well-considered directives for "Anthropocenic" preaching.

Francis is clear that preaching is not just an exercise of office but an ecclesial mission (no. 15). He is both brave and encyclopedic about what preaching and the homily is and is not to be: not to be dull (no. 11), doctrinal (no. 35), confined (no. 49), abstract (nos. 142 & 157), ugly (cf. nos. 36 and 142), obsessive (no. 49), out of contact with the local context (nos. 29, 45 &143), heartless (no. 139), essentially entertaining (no. 138), judgmental (no. 172), tortured (cf. no. 44), bureaucratic and inhospitable (no. 63), pessimistic (cf. no. 85), ostentatious (no. 95), rigid (no. 45), avuncular (cf. no. 139), self-centered (cf. no. 158), monologic (no. 137), long (no. 138), heartless (no 138), disconnected from God's Word (no. 146), inauthentic (no. 150), negative (no. 159), oppressive (nos. 187ff), and disengaged from society (nos. 238ff).

Shifting to the positive, Francis consistently emphasizes the nature, significance and even primacy of humanity (no. 55) for all evangelization, including preaching. Similarly when speaking of interreligious

[68] Edward Foley, "The Homily in the context of *Evangelii Gaudium,"* 30.vii.14, http://www.praytellblog.com/index.php/2014/07/30/the-homily-in-the-context-of-evangelii-gaudium/

dialogue, Francis notes that such a dialogue is first of all "a conversation about human existence" (no. 250). The reason for this reverent view of humanity is because each human being is "God's handiwork, his creation. God created each person in his image, and he or she reflects something of God's Glory" (no. 274). The "stranger" or "other" is an encounter with "sacred ground" (no 169). Every human being—each of whom Francis calls our brothers and sisters—are the very "prolongation of the incarnation for each of us" (no. 179). Francis concludes that "every person is immensely holy and deserves our love" (no 274).

In treating the topic of "informal preaching," the Pope notes that the first step in that venture is personal dialogue. This means listening to the joys, hopes, concerns and needs of the others.[69] "Only afterward is it possible to bring up God's word" (no. 128). When considering the homily itself, it is important for the preacher not only to contemplate the word but also "contemplate his people" (no 154). This requires keeping "an ear to the people" and developing the ability to link the "message of a biblical text to a human situation, to an experience which cries out for the light of God's word" (no. 154). Preacher's must adapt their language to that of the people and share in their lives (no. 158) if the preaching and evangelizing are to be effective and authentic. Moreover, the persistent and pervasive use of "heart" language—appearing in some form over 100 times in this document—suggest that the anthropological turn is a fundamental commitment in this evangelizing mission to that most human of sensitivities: empathy.

Highly indicative of preaching implications in the Anthropocene is Francis' characterization of preaching as "a mother's conversation":

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[69] Notice the strong resonance in these words with the opening lines of *Gaudium et Spes*.

> We said that the people of God, by the constant inner working of the Holy Spirit, is constantly evangelizing itself. What are the implications of this principle for preachers? It reminds us that the Church is a mother, and that she preaches in the same way that a mother speaks to her child, knowing that the child trusts that what she is teaching is for his or her benefit, for children know that they are loved. Moreover, a good mother can recognize everything that God is bringing about in her children, she listens to their concerns and learns from them. (no. 140).

Respecting the Natural World

Turning from theological anthropology to respect for nature as central to an Anthropocenic imperative for Roman Catholic preaching might seem contradictory. A foundational presumption giving rise to imagining an Anthropocene Age in the first place is the havoc humans have wrought on the natural world and the ensuing ecological crisis humanity has triggered through thoughtlessness, hubris, and greed. Christianity is often singled out as highly complicit in the destruction of our environment. The biblical roots of this purported cavalier attitude toward nature is found in the creation narrative that reveals "man," created in the image of God (Gen 1:27), as the "crown of creation" (cf. Ps 8:5) and given a divine injunction to rule and subdue the earth (Gen 1:28). The deploying of such texts for millennia led to a famous assertion Lyn White in 1967, that "Especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen."[70] Christianity does not have the best of track records for respecting the natural world.

While planet earth is approximately 4.5 billion years old, its biosphere – that upper portion of the planet about

[70] Lynn Townsend White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis," *Science* 155 (10 March 1967): 1203-1207.

12 miles thick where life exists – is only 3.5 billion years old.[71] *Homo sapiens* have only populated that biosphere for about 250,000 years or approximately .007% of its existence. While humanity is often conceptualized as separate from nature and external to the biosphere, such a model is no longer viable. As environmental scientist Folke and his colleagues summarize:

> In the twenty-first century, people and planet are truly interwoven and coevolve, shaping the preconditions for civilizations. Our own future on Earth, as part of the biosphere, is at stake. This new reality has major implications for human wellbeing in the face of climate change, loss of biodiversity, and their interplay.[72]

In a parallel vein, there has also been a theological rethinking in light of the rampant anthropocentrism that – as Prof. White so pointedly asserted – has marked Western Christianity. One leading figure was Thomas Berry. Self-identified as a "geologian," his groundbreaking vision of a mutually enhancing human-earth relations was encapsulated in his vision of an "Ecozoic" age, in which humans would recover their orientation to the world.[73] Important in this rethinking are biblical theologians such as Dianne Bergant who have offered alternate readings of the Book of Genesis that has been so often employed to assert humanity's dominion over the earth. In her revisiting of Genesis, Bergant argues that the biblical text does not depict human beings as

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[71] Carl Folke, et al., "Our future in the Anthropocene Biosphere," *Ambio* 50 (2021): 834-869, https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13280-021-01544-8

[72] Ibid.

[73] While his bibliography is extensive, a key piece is his *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* (New York: Bell Tower, 1999).

> …autonomous sovereigns of the natural world who were granted a license to exploit the earth or tyrannize other creatures, as a literal reading has sometimes claimed. Instead, they were issued a mandate which included serious responsibility for the world of which they were a part, and accountability to the creator for the governance of that world. This way of reading the creation narrative challenges any kind of tyrannical, distorted, or misguided anthropocentrism.[74]

Since the end of the 19th century Roman Catholic social teaching has addressed the impact of the industrial revolution on people. The first great move here was Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum,* which focused on the oppression of the working class and the dignity of the individual worker.[75] 20th century Roman Catholic teaching continued this emphasis, with Paul VI instructing that the environment and the integrity of creation received serious attention. In his 1971 apostolic letter *Octogesima adveniens* he warned about the "ill-considered exploitation of nature" in which humanity is becoming "the victim of the degradation."[76] Pope John Paul II placed concern about the environment more firmly in Church teaching, instructing that Christian's responsibility within creation and their duty towards it "are an essential part of their faith" further noting that "the ecological crisis is a moral issue."[77] Subsequently

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[74] Dianne Bergant, "Imago Dei: image or divine, interpreting the Hebrew Bible," in *Ecology and Theology of Nature,* ed. Linda Hogan, João Vila-Chã, Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator (London: SCM Press, 2018), 34-39, https://concilium-vatican2.org/en/original/bergant/

[75] https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum.html

[76] No. 21, https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_letters/documents/hf_p-vi_apl_19710514_octogesima-adveniens.html

[77] World Day of Peace Message (1990), no. 15, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-

Pope Benedict XVI – dubbed the "green Pope" – presented an extensive case for protecting the environment, notable stating "If you want to cultivate peace, protect creation."[78]

The culmination of these developments is Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical "*Laudato* Si': On Care for our Common Home,"[79] strategically released before the 2015 Paris conference on climate change. Among the many notable elements in this encyclical, most important is Francis' emphasis on an "integral ecology." This enhanced ecological view refutes "inadequate presentation[s] of Christian anthropology [which] gave rise to a wrong understanding of the relationship between human beings and the world" (no. 116). Francis' fresh reading of biblical sources such as the creation accounts in Genesis "suggest that human existence is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbor and with the earth itself" (no. 66). Since "everything is connected" deep communion with nature must be connected to compassion and concern for fellow human beings (no. 91). Thus, "a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor" (no 49). Here Francis combines concern for nature with his very positive

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ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html

78 https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20091208_xliii-world-day-peace.html ; for a more extensive examination of Benedict XVI's advocacy for the environment, see James Schaefer and Tobias Winright, eds., *Celebrating and Advancing Magisterial Discourse on the Ecological Crisis* (Lanham MD: Lexington Books, 2013).

79 https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

theological anthropology, giving new breadth to Folke's assertion that "people and planet are truly interwoven."

As we previously illustrated how the eucharistic rite of the 1969 *Missale Romanum* reveals an increasingly positive theological anthropology, so does that rite demonstrate a deep appreciation of nature.[80] Reverence for creation in the Judeo-Christian tradition – with an awareness that creation itself offers praise and adoration to God – is a more ancient tradition than even that of the eucharist. The Psalms that so regularly punctuate Christian Eucharist are filled with texts about heaven and earth, sun and moon, shining stars and the waters above the heavens praising the Lord (Ps 148). One fulsome passage is from the Book of Daniel in which everything from lighting and whales to birds and snow are summoned to offer cosmic praise to the Creator (Dan 3:57-82). The Psalmists recognizes that entirely independent of human aid, all of creation praises God (Ps 19:1-4). The New Testament also confirms that God is "above all and through all and in all" (Eph 4:6), that all creation waits in eager expectation for revelation (Rom 8:19), and that every creature in heaven, on earth and in the sea offers praise and worship "to him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb" (Rev 5:13).

Some may be surprised at the many references to creation and ecological resonances reverberating through the ordinary texts, gestures and elements of the Mass. This is rooted in the uninterrupted tradition of Christian worship heartily embracing gifts drawn from the earth: most prominently wheat bread and grape wine, but also the wax of bees, oil from olives, water from the seas, incense from trees and plants, ashes from palms, stone from the earth, and the wood of the cross. More

[80] Much of what follows on the creational aspects of Eucharistic worship is drawn from my *Eucharistic Adoration after Vatican II* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2022).

contextually, where would Northern hemisphere Easter celebrations be without lilies, or Christmas festivals be without sanctuaries bursting with fir trees and poinsettias? Some theologians call this "catholic imagination":[81] a pervasive belief that God is aligned with and consistently revealed in creation. This catholic imagination affirms our deployment of these many splendors of creation in our official eucharistic worship.

More specific are the multiple liturgical texts brimming with ecological references and creational resonance. Joris Geldhof[82] has provided a rich overview of many of these. Among his many examples from *Missale Romanum* is the blessing formula for Christmas, which assert that through the incarnation God has joined earthly and heavenly things. Thus, from a theological perspective, the nativity of the Only-Begotten has cosmic and not simply human ramifications. The second preface from the same feast confirms that Christ's coming in history not only restores the descendants of Adam and Eve but also restores the entirety of creation. The Third Eucharistic Prayer, echoing the Psalmists notes that it is right and just that every creature praise God. Geldhof goes on to recall the insights of the celebrated Jesuit liturgist Joseph Gelineau (d. 2008), peritus at Vatican II. Commenting on the newly created 4th Eucharistic Prayer emerging after that Council, Gelineau observed that this prayer – unlike any other before it – reflected a "cosmic sense."

No part of the reformed Mass calibrates eucharistic worship to the created world more than the newly

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[81] Classic here is David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1998).

[82] Joris Geldhof, "Fruit of the Earth, Work of Human Hands, Bread of Life: The Ordo Missae on Creation and the world," in *Full of your Glory: Liturgy, cosmos, Creation, e*d. Teresa Berger (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2019), 245-265.

fashioned "Preparation of the gifts and table." As noted above, this freshly shaped ritual moment liturgy does not focus on offering. Instead, this transitional rite from the Liturgy of the Word to the eucharistic prayer is fundamentally marked by praise. Devoid of intercession this benediction brims with praise for the God of all creation who allows the gifts of the earth to be transformed through human collaboration to be the very stuff of the Eucharist. This creational facet is not new in Christian worship. As Teresa Berger has demonstrated, early Christian ritual texts rooted worship *in principio*, i.e., in God's primordial activity in creation."[83]

Preaching Implications

The preaching implications previously enumerated concerning a more positive theological anthropology emerging from the 1969 *Novus Ordo* could be considered largely stylistic. While the preaching vision borrowed from Pope Francis certainly included some instructions concerning the processes involved in constructing a homily (e.g., "keeping an ear to the people) most of his preaching strategies concerned the deployment of language and the delivery of such language (e.g., preaching as "a mother's conversation"). Characterizing these preaching implications as largely stylistic in no way diminishes their import or power. As John O'Malley has famously highlighted, the stylistic changes in the language of Vatican II was one of its key changes modulating the way the Church relates to its adherents and the rest of humanity.

As to preaching strategies related to the Church's respect for and engagement with the natural world, it is

[83] Teresa Berger, "'All you have created rightly gives you praise': Re-thinking liturgical studies, re-rooting worship in Creation," *Ex Fonte – Journal of Ecumenical Studies in Liturgy* 1 (2022): 5-29, Doi: https://exfonte.org/index.php/exf/article/view/7270

content rather than style that requires emphasizing. This does not suggest that the familial tone or respectful style previously accentuated is to be abandoned. Rather, that positive and engaging style needs to be wed to a content that is regularly missing from Roman Catholic preaching, i.e., an engagement with the sciences.[84]

The Roman Catholic Church has had a sometimes contentious relationship with the sciences. A pivotal example of such was the 17th century rejection of the theory of heliocentrism and condemnation of its primary proponent Galileo Galilei. While that landmark case was eventually resolved (over 350 years later),[85] there endures a "Galileo effect" within many church circles, i.e., an undercurrent of at least indifference if not suspicion about the sciences and their impact on human life. While much of Western Europe pushed forward during the Enlightenment with scientific experiments and inquiries that would usher in modernity, there was much resistance to human rationality during this same period within the Roman Catholic Church.[86] These struggles emerged during the Second Vatican Council, especially around the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. That document refreshingly considered the Church as "in" rather than "against" the world. While that document affirmed that the Church has profited

[84] This assertion was confirmed by a major grant in 2020 from the Templeton Foundation for developing strategies for introducing the sciences into Roman Catholic homiletics. See https://ctu.edu/initiatives/preaching-with-the-sciences/

[85] See https://www.vaticanobservatory.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Galileo_ed._McMullin.pdf

[86] Some of this is brilliantly documented in John McGreevy's brilliant *Catholicism: A Global History from the French Revolution to Pope Francis* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2020). McGreevy provides a breathtaking overview of the ongoing conflict between "progress" and "tradition" in the Church, and especially how the powerful Ultramontane movement posed multiple obstacles to the Roman Catholic Church having a fruitful dialogue with the sciences.

from human development and that the sciences profit the Church, there was staunch opposition to this stance by a vocal minority of the Council Fathers. This lingering Galileo effect has reared its head in debates over immunizations (especially for children), climate control, and more recently the COVID pandemic and the vaccines developed in its wake.

A trained chemist, Pope Francis has promoted a positive approach to the sciences. In his *Laudato Si'* he insists that, in response to the climate crisis and the damage we have done to planet earth, "no branch of the sciences and no form of wisdom can be left out" (no. 63). To that end, Francis even includes therein a chapter on "Religions in Dialogue with Science" (nos. 199-202). This chapter well mirrors the dialogue model of engagement that Ian Barbour proposes in his influential *When Science meets Religion*.[87]

Befriending the sciences as reliable dialogue partners is an important homiletic strategy in this Anthropocene age. Anecdotal evidence suggests that Roman Catholic preachers consistently engage the scriptures and often draw from popular culture or literature in the homiletic moment. However, turning to the sciences for sermonic metaphors or examples appears to be a rare occurrence.

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[87] According to Barbour, possible relationships between religion and science can be characterized through 4 models. First is the conflict model, contending that science and religion are in perpetual and principal conflict. Next is the independence model, which holds that science and religion explore separate domains, ask distinct questions and exist in two different worlds. They are not in conflict, but also not in any position to craft a shared conversation; the chasm is too great. The dialogue model assumes that there is common ground between them and proposes their mutual relationship without necessarily being in conflict. Finally, the integration model looks for ways to unify science and theology. See, Ian Barbour, *When Science Meets Religion* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2000), 9-38.

This is not a proposal for sporadic preaching about the current environmental crisis or some other obvious issue at the juncture of religion and science. Such isolated pulpit forays provide little insurance that they will engage the baptized in the homiletic dialogue if a larger framework is missing. Thus, it is important to cultivate a catholic imaginary in the assembly that affirms the interconnectedness of people and planet, theology and science, spirituality and empirical data. This is a homiletic venture consistently connecting a positive theological anthropology with a positive theological cosmology. If nature is repeatedly revealed as "good" in our foundational creation narratives, if animals and mountains are capable of giving God praise, and if the empirical world is a unique and celebrated lens for divine revelation,[88] then it is both appropriate and necessary that preaching in tune with an Anthropocene age consistently and respectfully engages the sciences as a homiletic friend.

Epilogue

There are many labels applied to the current moment in cosmic, geological, and human history. It is the 14th million millennia since the birth of the universe, 1.5 billion years before the earth enters the scorching outer layers of the sun, 90 seconds to midnight on the doomsday clock, a period of postmodernity or late modernity or new modernity, an age of unprecedented polarization, of diminishing institutional religion, retreating Christianity, and more. Such labels, of varying empirical accuracy, are ultimately proverbial in the sense that they provide some wisdom for flourishing in the current age.

[88] Quoting Pope John Paul II, Pope Francis speaks of creation is a divine revelation, *Laudato Si'*, no. 85.

While the Anthropocene has been proposed as a geological, environmental and even cultural designation for the human present, it too is ultimately proverbial. This is the fundamental reason why the framework has been embraced and debated across so many disciplines. To the extent that one embraces, defines, nuances or reject the designation, so too must one embrace, define, nuance or reject its wisdom implications for living in the current age.

The Anthropocene Age offers much wisdom in what Roman Catholicism and much of Western Christianity considers this era of institutional diminishment, ecclesial tumult, and liturgical reform. In the midst of enormous polarization between a very splintered right and left, between forces of orthodoxy and liberalization, between what might be considered "woke" and "anti-woke" Catholicism, the Anthropocene proposes a path that puts religion in general and Roman Catholicism in particular in a respectful dialogue with the world in the spirit of Vatican II – especially the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World – and in the reformed *Novus Ordo* that evolved in its aftermath.

This does not initiate a new homiletic mode as much as affirm and expand one which emerged in the late 20th century. The turn to the subject, initiated by Fred Craddock, projects an implicitly positive theological anthropology as it presumes the value and dignity of believers in drawing their own conclusions and subsequently in shaping their own journey towards God. Besides a Copernican turn towards the subject (i.e., the baptized and, more importantly, communities of the baptized), the Anthropocene also posits an expanded vision in which the human is integrally wed to the global community, planet earth, and the cosmos. This broadens the preaching horizon not only to the whole of humanity, but further to the whole of creation even as the universe

expands before us. A homiletic approach without at least scientific curiosity if not some strands of scientific commitment is at least compromised and ultimately unable to preach into this emerging reality and consciousness.

The Gospels teach that God had a love affair with the world (John 3:16), long before there existed any religions or churches. An Anthropocene homiletic demands respecting and nurturing that love affair.

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