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Venerating Earth: Three Sacramental Perspectives

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A sense of the sacred in and through the world has prevailed in religious and indigenous traditions from their prehistoric roots to the present. Among the most prominent in the Christian theological tradition are the presence of God in the world, characteristics of God mediated by the world, and the innermost intimacy with God when receiving the Eucharist – the Body of Christ. These three ways in which God is sensed are depicted variously in Old Testament stories of the ancient Israelites’ experiences of God, the Book of Wisdom’s identification of God’s power, wisdom and goodness that are manifested by the sensate world, and the New Testament description of the institution of the sacrament of the Eucharist by Jesus the Christ. From these biblical inspirations, Christian theologians in the early Patristic to late Medieval periods (250–1550 CE) reflected variously on the sacramentality of creation – the faith perspective that God who is invisible can be experienced and known to some extent when a person is attentive to the world that God made possible.

Eminent scientists who launched the seventeenth century revolution expressed their faith in God as motivation for studying the world and, thereby, knowing about God. They recognized the difference between quantitative knowledge they were seeking when probing God’s creation and their deeper quest for qualitative knowledge about God who made the world and their ability to seek knowledge about it possible. As the natural sciences advanced and specializations within them developed, scientists’ expressions of the faith dimensions of their efforts diminished in the scientific literature. Science became a secular enterprise subject to its universally accepted and respected methods of functioning. Increasing confidence in verifiable knowledge, reliance on reason as the key means for knowing and metaphysically reductionistic ways of thinking about the world became prominent.

1 Attributed to God’s creation for inspiring awe, wonder, great respect and veneration, but not divine and worshiped.
Complicating and confusing this disjointed intellectual milieu were biblical literalists who interpreted Genesis 1-11 as scientific accounts of how God created and related to the world, shuddered at discoveries by geologists who measured the ages of rocks and by evolutionary biologists who proffered the evolution of species by natural selection, and ignored the burgeoning efforts of biblical scholars to investigate texts using exegetical methods aimed at understanding the meaning that inspired writers were conveying about their experiences of God in the contexts of their times and worldviews. Within this fray, theological discourse became increasingly entrenched in reflections on the human person as the primary subject of theological discourse, while ethicists focused on human freedom and how humans should act toward one another. The theology of creation and human interconnections with other animate and inanimate creatures distanced to the margins of the discipline.

The mid-20th-century detection of background radiation that scientists traced to a singularity approximately 13.8 billion years ago resurrected some theologians' interest in the cosmos. As they and scientists who professed faith in God reflected on cogent ways of thinking about God's activity in relation to the world, scientists trained in biological conservation and ecology began sharing alarming evidence about the accelerated rate of species extinction, the degradation and destruction of ecological systems (e.g. wetlands, prairies, rivers, lakes and mangrove swamps), and an increasingly endangered biosphere due to human overuse and abuse. Scholars of the world religions responded by plumbing their traditions to seek promising ways in which the faithful can and should respond. Among the traditions discovered and retrieved in the history of Christian theology was the sacramentality of creation with its corresponding warrant to venerate God's presence and character in and through the sensate world as the theological basis for responding to the ecological crisis. Concurrently, some liturgical theologians focused on the ethical significance of natural goods that are used when celebrating the sacraments.

In this chapter, I explore these three prominent ways in which the sacramentality of creation has been nuanced over the centuries: (1) experiencing the presence of God in the world; (2) studying the world

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2 Featured in a series conferences during the 1990s co-sponsored by the Vatican Observatory and the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences in which scientists, theologians and philosophers reflected on divine action and yielded several anthologies listed at www.ctns.org/research/past-research/scientific-perspectives-divine-action/books.

3 Most prominently, the late biochemist and Anglican Reverend Canon Arthur Peacocke and the Roman Catholic liturgist and Monsignor Kevin Irwin.
in depth to discern God's character; and (3) receiving the Eucharist as a heightened encounter with God. Their significance for addressing the ecological crisis today is explained to yield efficacious ways of venerating other people, species and systems that constitute Earth.

EXPERIENCING THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN THE WORLD

Throughout the Bible, inspired writers depicted the ancient Israelites' experiences of God as present to them individually and as a community. God is depicted as calling, listening and responding to them, self-manifesting through theophanies, and speaking to them through prophets who reminded them about their covenantal responsibilities. Jews, Greeks and Romans who followed Jesus the Christ professed faith in Him as the Son of God who taught them how to orient their temporal lives toward eternal happiness in God's Kingdom. This interplay between God's immanence – presence in and through the world – and God's transcendence – more than and beyond the world and time – permeated the Bible and early Christian texts.

Christian theologians reflected variously on God's immanence during the Patristic and Medieval periods. Most prominent among them were Augustine of Hippo, Bernard of Clairvaux, Hildegard of Bingen, Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, Thomas Aquinas, Ignatius of Loyola and John of the Cross who thought meaningfully about God's presence in the world within the contexts of their times and worldviews. Though reflection on God's transcendence of the world increased and God's immanence decreased after the seventeenth century, members of the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits) founded by Ignatius of Loyola in 1534 had dedicated themselves to meditating on the presence of God in all things, seeking God in them, serving God by serving others, and prioritizing deeds over words. Foundational to their training was and continues to be Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises*, a manual of detailed directions for a thirty-day retreat that each Jesuit endeavors to take annually and others are able to take in various formats. The fourth week of the *Spiritual Exercises* culminates in "Contemplation to Attain Love," wherein the retreatant dwells on God's presence in the

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world and reflects on the meaning of God’s love, God’s loving actions for the beloved, and the beloved’s actions in return.5

Directing his followers from his sixteenth-century understanding of the world as a divinely designed, static and geocentric organism with fixed (versus evolving) species, all of which have God-given purposes for existing and acting, Ignatius underscored four major points in this contemplation that have significance today when meditating on (1) the blessings of creation and redemption through Jesus the Christ and blessings that each person has received, (2) God’s dwelling in all creatures, (3) how God works and labors in all creatures for each person, and (4) all of these blessings and gifts as having been given through God’s unlimited power, justice, goodness and mercy. These points are particularly helpful when we reflect from our current scientific understanding of the world as historically emergent, evolutionary, dynamic, holistic and open to a future that cannot be predicted with accuracy. They are helpful when we understand Earth as consisting of a multiplicity of biota and abiotota that are related, ecologically interdependent, and mutually affected by random occurrences that are constrained by basic laws of physics. They are helpful when recognizing ourselves as products of evolution who are related to everything living and non-living in the universe – especially within Earth. They are helpful when realizing how radically dependent we are upon other species, the air, land and water for our health and well-being physically, socially and economically. Finally, these points are helpful as well as poignantly meaningful when thinking about God’s love for us and responding with profound gratitude.

The first point – recalling with “deep affection” how much God has done for me and given to me – leads to pondering what to offer “in all reason and justice” to God. After reflecting and pondering, retreatants are urged to offer themselves fully to God and to express their offer prayerfully:

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and all my will—all that I have and possess. You, Lord, have given all that to me. I now give it back to you, O Lord. All of it is yours. Dispose of it wholly according to your will. Give me your love and your grace, for that is enough for me.

This prayer constitutes an expression of total surrender to God grounded in a deep satisfaction that God’s love and grace are wanted and needed

for living in the world. The person who surrenders to God’s love and relies on God’s grace can proceed confidently into the future with profound humility before God to orient all actions toward achieving “greater honor and glory” for God (ad maiorem Dei gloriam).

From this total surrender to God and commitment to lead a God-centered life, the retreatant proceeds to the second point—meditating on how God dwells in all creatures. God dwells “in the elements giving them existence; in the plants giving them life, in the animals giving them sensation; in human beings, giving them intelligence.” Subsequently, the retreatant is urged to meditate on how God dwells in oneself, “giving me existence, life, sensation, and intelligence ... and making me his temple” within which God dwells. God’s dwelling is immediate, innermost and intimate. God’s dwelling is not physical per se. God’s dwelling is foundational for all creatures’ existence by having made them possible, actively maintaining them in existence, and remaining present to the person who has the ability to know God’s presence.

Today we can meditate on God’s dwelling in the elements of the land, water and air by actively maintaining the cosmic process from which Earth emerged over four and a half billion years ago and dwelling within them to the present. We can meditate on God’s dwelling in forests, grasslands, tundra, deserts and ice sheets as they emerged over biological time and dwells within them today by actively maintaining their existence. We can meditate on God’s dwelling in invertebrates, fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals that God made possible through the evolutionary process, dwelled within them as they emerged, and dwells within them today as foundational for their existence. As mammalians who have emerged with the ability to understand, we can meditate on God’s dwelling within all people, species and systems of Earth, value God’s dwelling in them, understand their importance in relation to one another, decide how to conserve them, and act accordingly.

The third point turns to meditating on how God labors and works in all creatures of Earth for each person—in “the heavens, elements, plants, fruits, cattle, and all the rest.” Ignatius’s emphasis at this stage of meditation is to urge the retreatant to realize all God is doing for him or her personally by actively maintaining these essentials for the person’s life, to underscore the person’s total dependence on God, and to spur the person to want to express deep gratitude to God for them. Important to recognize is Ignatius’s understanding that God’s ways of working and laboring for the person in all constituents of Earth are concurrent with
their ways of existing and, if animate, acting according to their natural abilities that God made possible. God's actions are vastly different from our and other creatures' actions because God's concurrent activity is foundational and essential for the existence of all creatures. God's actions do not interfere with the innate capabilities of creatures to act, including human capabilities to choose to reflect on their mutual dependence on God for their existence, deciding to act, and acting.

How can we meditate today on God's laboring and working in all creatures of Earth in ways that benefit the human person? We can meditate on God's actively sustaining the atmosphere's ability to provide oxygen for our breathing, warmth for our comfort and growth, precipitation needed for trees and vegetation vital for our survival, and protection from the sun's harmful ultraviolet radiation. We can meditate on God's actively sustaining bodies of water for drinking and protein, travel and transportation, and many opportunities for recreation. We can meditate on God's actively sustaining the process of photosynthesis by which green plants and other organisms use sunlight to convert carbon dioxide and water into glucose for human nutrition. We can meditate on God's actively sustaining the evolutionary process that yielded a plethora of wondrous species for us to encounter, study and conserve. We can meditate on God's actively sustaining the development of ecological systems within which we can choose to function as responsible participants. We can meditate on God's having empowered the universe to develop a plethora of galaxies within which at least one has a solar system with a planet we inhabit with others, can know the story of our emergence, can recognize the threats that imperil the continuation of this story, and can decide how to mitigate them.

In the culminating point, Ignatius directs the retreatant to consider all blessings and gifts of power, justice, goodness and mercy received from God who is supremely and infinitely powerful, just, good and merciful. Ignatius directs the retreatant to reflect on using these gifts in ways that honor and glorify God. Today we must consider how to use our decision-making abilities by acting justly toward other people, other species and systems of Earth that are currently imperiled by human impediments to their flourishing. What we decide will demonstrate the extent to which we are grateful to God. From an Ignatian perspective, our gratitude must be demonstrated through actions, not simply words.

Thus, as epitomized by Ignatius of Loyola in the final contemplation of his Spiritual Exercises, meditating on the presence of God in all living and inanimate creatures, God's dwelling in all creatures without interfering with their innate abilities or interactions, and God's working
and laboring in all creatures for human well-being have significance for addressing the deterrents to Earth’s flourishing that conservation scientists are identifying today. Opting to lead a God-centered life can orient our interactions with people, species and systems of Earth toward our common good for the greater honor and glory of God.

KNOWING ABOUT GOD BY STUDYING GOD’S CREATION

Though many manifestations of God’s character are depicted throughout the Old and New testaments, believing that characteristics of God can be discerned when studying the physical world is grounded in the Book of Wisdom, St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans, and Acts of the Apostles. The unnamed writer of the Book of Wisdom insisted that “God who is” can be known not only through the stories of the ancient Israelites’ experiences of God, but also by analogy when studying the world. Cautioning them against nature worship that was rampant in Alexandria, the sage characterized as “foolish” any Jew who cannot discern God the artisan from the greatness and beauty of creatures. St. Paul also exhorted followers of Jesus to be steadfast in their faith in God and to avoid being swayed by “fools” in their midst who worship animals and other creatures. Christians should be giving glory to God and expressing gratitude to God for the world because “his invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and perceived in what he has made” from creation’s beginning. In Acts of the Apostles, St. Paul characterized the rain from heaven and fruit-bearing seasons as witnesses of God’s kindness and the seasons and boundaries of regions as having been established by God so people might seek and find God. Readily available to all, the “book of nature” should be read as the inspired writers thought God intended – to know about God by studying God’s creation.

Early Christian theologians continued preaching and writing about God’s intention that the faithful should study the physical world through which God’s attributes can be discerned – especially God’s goodness, power and wisdom – and to express their gratitude to God.

6 Wisdom 13:5.
7 Wisdom 13:1.
8 Romans 1:22.
9 Romans 1:19-20.
10 Acts 14:15-17.
11 Acts 17:24-29.
for what they found. Among the many eminent Christian theologians who reflected on the sacramental character of God’s creation was Athanasius (295–373), who marveled at the harmonious functioning of the diverse physical components that conveyed God as a unifier. In homilies on the six days of creation as depicted in the opening chapter of the Book of Genesis, Basil of Caesarea (329–379) urged observing in the smallest of animals and plants impressions of God's wisdom and thanking God for the gift of intelligence to study them. Augustine of Hippo (354–430) encouraged adopting a sacramental perspective of God’s creation that gives testimony to “the ineffably and invisibly great, the ineffably and invisibly beautiful” God, and manifests traces of the Trinity—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—that are discernible in the unity, form and order of each creature.

Augustine's trinitarian perspective proved highly influential as evidenced in the works of subsequent theologians. One was Hugh of St. Victor (1096–1141) who detailed in De tribus diebus how God’s goodness, wisdom and power can be recognized when closely studying many types of creatures. For Hugh, God’s power creates, wisdom governs and goodness preserves, as manifested respectively through the immensity of creatures, their beauty, and their usefulness. He continued in increasing meticulousness to explore these manifestations of the Trinity in whales, crocodiles, elephants, hedgehogs, snakes, birds, fruit vines, sprouting plants, streams, precious metals, fragrances and cosmic bodies, while expressing amazement throughout and praising them for manifesting God’s attributes. In Didascalicon, Hugh emphasized the necessity of pursuing knowledge about the world to discover how to act in relation to others in ways that demonstrate our responsibility to God.

Also influenced by Augustine’s trinitarian perspective, the Franciscan friar Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (1217–1274) studied the physical world as the first step a person takes toward contemplating

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God when recognizing God's power, wisdom and goodness in all creatures.\textsuperscript{18} In \textit{Itinerarium mentis in Deum}, Bonaventure exhorted the faithful to ask for God's help - God's grace - that is readily available for effectively using their five senses through which to ascend this "ladder" to God.

Thomas Aquinas (1224/5-74) considered the entire universe of many diverse interacting inanimate and living entities as most revelatory of God's attributes. Though each creature manifests God in some way, Aquinas taught, God's goodness is best manifested by the orderly functioning of all creatures in relation to one another according to their natures to achieve the good of the whole.\textsuperscript{19} Meditating on God's works of creation plays a pivotal role for the faithful, Aquinas insisted: They can advance their admiration for God's wisdom in having created all the wondrous works that relate orderly to one another, God's sublime power in creating and sustaining them in existence, and God's goodness by having provided a plethora of good, beautiful and delightful creatures.\textsuperscript{20}

Among other eminent theologians who reflected on the sacramentality of creation are Gregory Palamas (1296-1359) who, following Augustine, underscored the incompleteness and indirectness of the knowledge of God that the person is able to obtain when studying the universe.\textsuperscript{21} In \textit{Institutes} and commentaries on the New Testament, John Calvin (1509-64) described investigating God's creation in depth (versus glancing fleetingly) as unfolding God's greatness, enrapturing our admiration for God, and refreshing our understanding of God's goodness.\textsuperscript{22} John Ray (1627-1705), the Puritan theologian and "father" of modern biology, composed \textit{The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of the Creation} in which he identified God's power and wisdom from the details and relationships of the physical world's diverse components.\textsuperscript{23} The Jesuit Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-89) wrote poetically about God's attributes that can be perceived in wild nature and expressed his disdain for the felling of aspens in "Binsey Poplars," the degradation of a river ecosystem in "Ribblesdale" and the destruction


\textsuperscript{19} For example, Thomas Aquinas, \textit{Summa theologiae}, 1.47.1.

\textsuperscript{20} Thomas Aquinas, \textit{Summa contra Gentiles}, 2.1-3.

\textsuperscript{21} Gregory Palamas, \textit{The Triads}, 2.3.15-16.

\textsuperscript{22} John Calvin, \textit{Institutes of the Christian Religion}, 1.5.9 and 1.14.21.

of forests, waterways, meadows and valleys "In the Valley of the Elwy" that impede God's self-manifestations.24

How can we think cogently and meaningfully today about attributes of God that are manifested by the universe and especially Earth when informed by scientific findings? God's power can be recognized as voluntarily self-limited through the freedom given to the universe to evolve at its own pace in expanding place and extending time. God's goodness can be recognized through the seemingly endless potentialities with which God has endowed matter to develop creatively. God's wisdom can be recognized through the physical laws within which chance occurs as the universe grew in increasing diversity and complexity.

When theological discourse is informed by the contemporary sciences, some new attributes of God surface: Empowering the universe to develop itself while serving as its invigorating spiritual ground; freedom-giving through the ability of the universe to self-organize and produce entities out of many possibilities without dictation or coercion; generous through the many diverse beings and forces that can be observed and measured; caring by continuously sustaining the evolution of an internally self-sufficient universe of diverse beings that function harmoniously; humble by allowing the universe with its diverse beings to emerge without interference and to play itself out in surprising ways amid considerable suffering, decay, waste and death; and, patient through the billions of years the universe has expanded from an infinitesimal entity to billions of galaxies out of which at least one planet evolving around a medium-sized, middle-aged star has produced a magnificent array of ecological systems with varied biota that include intelligent beings who have the ability to study, reflect on and respond to God's self-revelation through the universe.

How does sensing and studying Earth from this sacramental perspective help address the ecological crisis? The faithful in Europe, Canada and the United States could venerate – honor, respect and revere – Earth because God is self-manifesting to them attributes that are otherwise invisible. The faithful could venerate the biosphere of Earth as a manifestation of God's goodness by curtailing fossil fuel emissions so an abundance of life can flourish into the future. The faithful could venerate the Atlantic Ocean, the Great Lakes, old growth forests in Oregon and Europe, the Acadian Forest, the

coral reef of the Florida Keys, the rare wetlands within the San Ber­
nardino National Wildlife Refuge, and other ecological systems whose
functioning is impeded by abusive human activities that shroud
manifestations of God’s empowerment. The faithful in the United
States could venerate biological diversity by preventing the weak­
ening of the 1973 Endangered Species Act and fulfilling obligations
under the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity so species are not
inhibited from manifesting God’s generosity and freedom-giving to
evolve and interact with other species and abiota.

Of course, this sacramental perception of Earth assumes deep faith
in God who made all natural constituents possible, actively sustains
their cumulative existence, and self-manifests through them for the
faithful to sense and study. To have this deep faith in God and belief
that God is self-manifesting through the world should motivate us to
remain attentive and open to God’s self-manifestations, to study biota,
abiota, ecological systems and marginal areas in detail for what they
tell us about God, and to deter impediments to discerning them. As
eminent theologians have underscored, God’s grace is readily available
to individuals and groups whose members are open to receiving the
strength to preserve and conserve God’s sacramental creation and to act
cooperatively with God’s grace.

RECEIVING THE SACRAMENT OF THE EUCHARIST

The third way of thinking about the sacramentality of creation centers
on the sacrament of the Eucharist – the Body of Christ. Initiated by
Jesus during his last supper with his disciples before his bodily suffering
and death, the Eucharist is the central sacrament of Christian worship.
It commemorates Jesus’s breaking and blessing bread as his “body,” dis­
tributing it, blessing the wine as his “blood,” and asking the disciples
to repeat these words and actions in remembrance of him. Christians
have honored this request from the early formation of the Church to the
present day as the height of liturgical gatherings in which we receive
the Eucharist openly and humbly. The graces imparted when receiv­
ing the Body of Christ are intended to help us live as Jesus taught and
demonstrated with hope of spending eternal life in the presence of God
the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In the Eucharist, the totality of God’s creation finds its greatest
exaltation as an expression of the Incarnation whereby God became
flesh, thereby joining the divine with the materiality of God’s cre­
at ion. The Eucharist serves as “a source of light and motivation for our
concerns for the environment," as Pope Francis taught, and directs us to care for Earth.25

The Eucharist also has specific significance for addressing the ecological crisis in at least three additional ways. One pertains to the use of grapes from which wine is made, wheat that is ground to make bread, the soil in which grapes and wheat are grown, and the sun, air and rain that nurture their growth. They are goods of Earth made possible by God, and they should be valued intrinsically for their innate characteristics and for their relatedness to one another when constituting systems of Earth. They should also be valued instrumentally for their use in the Eucharistic liturgy. For these goods of Earth, God must be thanked and praised. Their use in the liturgy shows veneration for Earth that reflects God the Creator and the Word of God made flesh in the human-divine person of Jesus the Christ. A connection between the visible from which the bread and wine are made and the Invisible who made them possible occurs as God’s saving grace is communicated to participants in remembrance of Jesus the Christ who sacrificed Himself for us. Our reception of the Eucharist as the transformed wheat to bread to Christ’s body and grapes to wine to Christ’s blood becomes a heightened moment of encountering God and God’s loving presence within us materially and spiritually. The grace imparted continues in our daily lives as we develop and demonstrate moral virtues (e.g. prudence, justice, moderation and fortitude) and exercise the gifts of the Holy Spirit (wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord) that orient us toward maintaining a right relationship with God. Because we are intricately connected with other species and systems of Earth, our actions in relation to them are oriented ultimately toward God and the common good of God’s creation – its flourishing.

Another significance the Eucharist has for addressing the ecological crisis pertains to the labor required for producing the bread and wine that are offered as gifts for use in this solemn liturgy. The dignity of human labor is paramount as explained in Catholic Social Teaching,26 and skillful labor is required to grow and process the grain and other ingredients into bread, to grow and process grapes into wine, and to distribute the bread and wine for use in the Eucharistic liturgy as gifts of workers.

Participation in this process constitutes an opportunity to serve God by serving others - people, other species, and systems of Earth. Workers can serve God by tilling the soil, caring for the plants, harvesting them, and transporting, processing and distributing the bread and wine carefully and responsibly. Potential for abuse and wastefulness at all stages can be anticipated and should be avoided. All work can be accomplished with a view to the future by anticipating and avoiding adverse effects on future generations of people, other species, and systems of Earth. Seeking and following the advice of scientists becomes paramount for making evidence-based decisions that manifest a sincere desire to serve God by serving others.

The gathering of Christians and their active collaboration when celebrating and receiving the Eucharist constitutes the third significant way in which to address the ecological crisis. When celebrating the Eucharistic liturgy together, Christians are the “body of Christ,” as St. Paul taught the Corinthians. Each member has unique gifts that are essential to the functioning and flourishing of the Church. As Christ’s body receiving the Body of Christ during the Eucharistic liturgy, Christians share the love and saving power of God with one another. We can choose to respond lovingly by cooperating with one another and with God to conserve God’s creation. Together, we are strengthened by the Eucharist as a community of persons, each of whom transcends herself or himself to interact with others in a humble commitment to recognize and address assaults on vulnerable people, species, the air, land and waters in their locales. Together, Christians are strengthened by the Eucharist to mitigate these ecological assaults in their homes, neighborhoods, places of employment, areas of recreation, and ecological systems within which they function. Together, Christians are strengthened by the Eucharist to follow the principle of subsidiarity - to act as locally as possible and proceed to the next level of action when warranted. Together, Christians are strengthened by the Eucharist to identify ways of protecting and conserving endangered species endemic to their regions, curtailing threats to the functioning of ecological systems, and minimizing their emissions of climate-forcing greenhouse gases. Together, Christians are strengthened by the Eucharist to advocate

17 1 Corinthians 12.

action at levels of governance incrementally to county, state, national, binational and international levels. Together, Christians are strengthened by the Eucharist to act concurrently wherever possible on issues that are intricately interconnected with a plethora of social, economic and political problems.\(^9\)

Priests can facilitate parishioners' reflections and actions by sharing inspirations from eminent prelates and theologians in the Christian tradition, providing focused sermons, and offering opportunities for meditating on issues from their shared faith perspective. Bishops can lead by providing seminary training and continuing education on the doctrine of creation, directives to priests on local and regional environmental issues, faith-informed messages to parishes about environmental injustices that are occurring, and public statements explaining faith perspectives on environmental problems. Bishops can work together to address issues that transcend their geographic responsibilities to more expansive levels following the principle of subsidiarity. At the highest levels of Christianity, bishops can rely upon inspiration, encouragement and support from Pope Francis and the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development headed by Henry Cardinal Turkson and from Archbishop Justin Welby and the Church of England’s Environment Working Group coordinated by the Bishop of Salisbury.\(^{10}\) Bishops, priests and parishes can also rely on the Catholic Climate Covenant and the Global Catholic Climate Covenant for information about opportunities to act and advocate action.\(^{31}\) God’s grace is readily available to all through the Eucharist for accomplishing these tasks.

**CONCLUSION**

Reflection on the sacramentality of creation confirms its potential efficacy for addressing ecological concerns when experiencing God's presence in the world, discerning characteristics of God when studying the world, and receiving God most intimately in the Eucharist individually and collectively with other Christians. When experiencing God’s presence in all creatures, people who believe in God will orient their actions toward the greater honor and glory of God by demonstrating

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\(^{31}\) Accessible at https://catholicclimatecovenant.org/ and https://catholicclimatemovement.global/.
their valuing all creatures, their value to other species and abiota for
their mutual good, and their contributions to human well-being now
and in the future. When studying the world in depth to know about
God, we will act to preserve species and systems so others can have the
opportunity to discern God’s empowering the universe to develop over
expanding space and time, God’s freedom-giving to the universe to or­
ganize itself without coercion, God’s generosity in making possible the
emergence of a plethora of diverse living and inanimate entities, God’s
caring for them by sustaining their existence, God’s humility by allow­
ing all to emerge without interference amidst considerable suffering,
decay, waste and death, and God’s patience in awaiting the emergence
of creatures who can reflect on God’s self-revelation, and respond with
gratitude. When receiving the Eucharist, we will be strengthened indi­
vidually and collectively by God’s grace to seek ways of conserving the
community of Earth in all aspects of our lives at various levels of gover­
nance through direct action and advocacy. These three ways of perceiving
the world within which we encounter God constitute a promising
formula for venerating Earth that should stimulate Christian attitudes
and actions aimed at mitigating impediments to the flourishing of our
common home.

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