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## Co-Created and Co-Creator?

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# Co-Created and Co-Creator?

*A Theology of Nature*

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*“Look out into the universe and contemplate the glory of God.*

*Observe the stars, millions of them, twinkling in the night sky,*

*all with a message of unity, part of the very nature of God”<sup>1</sup>*

*- Sai Baba*

Imagine this: you wake up in the morning inside your comfortable house on one spring morning. After tossing your comforter aside, you walk casually down to where your coffee maker has already produced a steaming cup of dark roast. You slide open the door to the deck and as you do a cool breeze gently fills your kitchen. Walking outside, you gently press the mug to your face, where the warm sensation of energy fills both your mouth and your heart. Looking out you see your favorite willow tree bending gently as the wind takes it in its grips. On that tree you see a single cardinal sitting peacefully next to a black squirrel who doesn't seem to notice she is being watched. As you look you are filled with a sense of content. You begin to wonder after a few minutes, what the birds are doing, what inspires the squirrel. You begin to really look at the willow and are inspired at its sheer power, and yet its incredible softness. You see the greatness of God's creation and in it you see the all-powerful creator; you look at that scene and wonder if it is looking back at you with the same sense of inspiration. This paper seeks to address that scene, it seeks to understand who we are, and where we belong in the great scheme of the created universe.

The main goal of this paper is to develop an understanding of the place of Humanity in and amongst the rest of God's Creation. We look at this as a potential compass to environmental

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<sup>1</sup> "Sai Baba Quotes." BrainyQuote. Accessed May 07, 2019.  
[https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/sai\\_baba\\_184101](https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/sai_baba_184101).

stewardship and to discover a contemporary Catholic theology of nature. To do this, we must first analyze the contemporary context by exploring the historical trends that led us here. This involves a few distinct topics: first, we will take a glimpse into the historical progression of the readings and interpretations of Scripture – and of nature – from early Christianity until the contemporary era. Next, we will look at the progression of official Church doctrine, as well as the contributions of lay theological thinkers, on the respective standings of the non-human creation (NHC) and humanity. We will then explore a few models that represent this modern relationship, including my own newly developed relationship model. Eventually, this will lead to what this new model means for us as humans, as well as, how we are called to live it out both as the institution of the Church, and as everyday people.

### ***Historical Background:***

What makes someone who they are? Modern answers to this timeless question include: Parents, friendships, and even failures. While they are certainly distinct answers, each of them has one thing in common, namely that they are all based in experiences. It can be said, therefore that what we do, and what we experience in the past, helps guide and shape who we are in the present. In much the same way, the human race as a whole is shaped and guided by this concept. Where we (as humankind) are today, lies on the structural integrity of the engineers, philosophers, and doctors of the past. To begin our exploration, it is necessary to use this concept, and to read into that very history. We do this so that we might be able to get a clear view of the current state of scripture and the natural world.

The first place to start, when analyzing ancient Christian ideas on scripture and on nature, is in scripture itself.

According to the book of Genesis, God placed lights in the heavens ‘for signs and for seasons’ (Gen. 1:14). The heavenly lights thus served not only a practical purpose but for later interpreters acted as ‘signs’ of eternal verities.<sup>2</sup>

What Peter Harrison is saying here, is that, rooted in Genesis, the signs and glory of God can be seen in God’s great works. Harrison goes on to pick several other bible passages that exemplify this point, the most pertinent being: “The heavens declare the glory of God, the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech.” (Ps. 19:1-2).<sup>3</sup> Harrison does his best to analyze the importance of these passages in the ancient context. He cites Origen who seems to stress the importance of reading scripture allegorically.<sup>4</sup> This, in its own right, is important. However, for the sake of a strong theology of nature, it is imperative. “Allegory is not simply a technique for reading written texts, but is to do with discerning the moral and theological meanings of natural things”.<sup>5</sup> The reading of scripture is designed to see the creator within it. This is important because, “Nature, like scripture, is a book upon which we may contemplate.”<sup>6</sup> The effects of this method of allegorical study were that the very world could be seen and read as a way of understanding God; it gave creation value.

What becomes important about the features of the visible world is not how they function, nor how they interact causally, but what they signify. The world like a text will have a meaning, and systematic accounts of objects encountered in it will belong to a science of interpretation.<sup>7</sup>

The significance of creation is given to it by the way the creation displays its divine inheritance.

When you see the Creator’s traits in nature, studying nature becomes a way of studying God.

“Contemplation of the creatures ought properly to lead to the contemplation of the Creator

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<sup>2</sup> Harrison, Peter. *The Territories of Science and Religion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017. pg 57

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. pg. 58

<sup>5</sup> Ibid pg. 59

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Harrison, Peter. *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science*. Cambridge: International Society for Science and Religion, 2007. Pg. 17

Himself.”<sup>8</sup> The ancient view of NHC is such that nature is to be allegorically read, as a contemplation on the Creator. “All creatures are essentially a certain image and likeness of eternal wisdom.”<sup>9</sup> This concept is best summarized by Hugh of Saint Victor, who said: “Every nature tells of God; every nature teaches man; every nature reproduces its essential form and nothing in the universe is infecund.”<sup>10</sup>

Over time, however, like all things, this concept shifted and changed. Reformation thinkers helped push the general shift from an allegorical mode to a literal one. This is perhaps, best shown through the father of the reformation, Martin Luther, who said: “There is a vast difference between knowing that there is a God and knowing who or what God is. Nature knows the former... the latter is taught only by the holy spirit.”<sup>11</sup>

What once was a defined mode of interpretation gave way to: “skepticism about the allegorical mode of reading scripture and nature”.<sup>12</sup> Francis Bacon explains this transition clearly:

For as all works do shew forth the power and skill of the workman, and not his image; so, it is with the works of God, which do shew the omnipotency and wisdom of the maker, but not His image.<sup>13</sup>

As history progressed, NHC remained a source of visibility into God; it was just seen as an opportunity to view God’s marvelous powers rather than as allegorical or as a window into the *real traits* of God. While this shift may seem fairly arbitrary, its repercussions are immense. The significance of NHC was no longer a symbol into God, “The things of nature bore no universal

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<sup>8</sup> Harrison, Peter. *The Territories of Science and Religion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017. pg 57

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid* pg. 63

<sup>10</sup> Harrison, Peter. *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science*. Cambridge: International Society for Science and Religion, 2007. Pg. 56

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*. pg. 201

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid* pg. 75

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid* pg. 76

God given significance but instead had been arbitrarily allocated meanings by human agents.”<sup>14</sup>

NHC was slowly seen as less important in their own right as they no longer held a deeper meaning. NHC was no longer a window to God’s traits, but simply a show of God’s creative power. “The reformers constructed a new exegetical science which could find no place for the symbolic interpretation of the book of nature.”<sup>15</sup> As time continued to move forward and philosophical schools continued to shift with it, this literality bred way for an even more scientific method of understanding God and the NHC.

Literalism thus contributed to emergence of natural science in two distinct ways: one by evacuating nature of its symbolic significance, and second by restricting the possible meanings of the biblical narratives on creation and fall.<sup>16</sup>

What we would now refer to as ‘modern science’, comes out of this dramatic shift in scriptural and natural interpretations.

Boyle spoke of the creatures as “texts to whose exposition physiology is necessary.” Their meanings, if we may still call them that, lay within them, rather than beyond them.<sup>17</sup>

The view of the natural world went from pointing to the defining characteristics of God, to simply the knowledge and resources that the NHC could provide humanity. Modern science at this time, however, was not entirely secular. “We might come to know the creator through his creatures, and that we might gain knowledge of causes and effects in order to make use of them for the general good and benefit of mankind.”<sup>18</sup> What can be seen is that we still know God through the NHC, but only through the ways that the NHC can give value back to humanity. “God’s purposes in the creation could only be realized when the functions of those things

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<sup>14</sup> Harrison, Peter. *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science*. Cambridge: International Society for Science and Religion, 2007. Pg. 91

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* pg. 92

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 208

<sup>17</sup> Harrison, Peter. *The Territories of Science and Religion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017. pg 77

<sup>18</sup> Harrison, Peter. *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science*. Cambridge: International Society for Science and Religion, 2007. Pg. 169

originally designed for human use were discovered.”<sup>19</sup> In this way, through the turn away from allegory and the stripping of NHC’s value – outside of their uses – we see a rise in a culture of utilitarianism. “The shrinkage of the symbolic world of the middle ages brought with it an increasing emphasis on the utility of natural things.”<sup>20</sup>

Overwhelmingly, however, even this valued insight into God through the uses of NHC is stripped. Modern science begins to question whether the use of animals has anything to do with religion. “The claim that God had ordained some human purpose for every element of the creation might well be false.”<sup>21</sup> Leading eventually to the mainstream conclusion, that it does not. “They which believe that an almost innumerable multitude of heavenly bodies, were created for the commodity of the globe of the earth and for her inhabitants, as to their proper end, are deceived.”<sup>22</sup> Science takes a new role as exploring simply for the sake of knowledge, and NHC has lost all of its value outside of whatever ways that it can benefit humanity. Where has God gone in this transition? Darwin explains it well, saying, “The wonderful mechanisms of creatures do not bare testimony to a divine designer, but rather embody the end-results of millions of years of fortuitous accidents.”<sup>23</sup>

In summary, ancient Christian thought reflected on the NHC as windows into the traits and likeness of God, the protestant reformation shifted this. NHC was then seen as a window into the power of God, but it served no allegorical or symbolic significance. Eventually science became a source of purely secular knowledge, and utilitarian culture became omnipresent.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid pg. 168

<sup>20</sup> Ibid pg. 161

<sup>21</sup> Ibid pg. 184

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 182

<sup>23</sup> Ibid pg. 272



Atheism also amasses at this point in history. It is this latter culture that we find ourselves situated in today, the scientific mindset is the context in which we live our everyday lives.

The next step in our analysis is to see what developments the Church goes through along this same historical timeline.

### *Catholic Responses Regarding the NHC*

Though there are often misconceptions of the Church as a stagnant institution, looking through history we come to know that it is anything but. It is always progressing and always growing in a way that is attempting to live more fully in the light and life of Christ. This becomes apparent when we look at the historical developments of official teachings, as well as the contributions of other lay scholars in the Christian tradition, on humanity's relationship with the NHC. We start this exploration with what one would imagine the typical stance on NHC would be, scripted by Pope Leo XIII.

“But animal nature, however perfect, is far from representing the human being in its completeness, and is in truth but humanity's humble handmaid, made to serve and to obey.”<sup>24</sup> Pope Leo XIII writes this statement in *Rerum Novarum*, as a majority of papal encyclicals tend to do, taking human dominion to its ends. Non-human creation is subordinate. He goes on to identify that through our humanity and in the likeness of God, we are to cultivate the growth of nature. “Hence, man not only should possess the fruits of the earth, but also the very soil, inasmuch as from the produce of the earth he has to lay by provision for the future.”<sup>25</sup> The earth, and its resources are at the whim of the human possessor or to “mankind in general.”<sup>26</sup> What Leo

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<sup>24</sup> Leo XIII. "Rerum Novarum." *Humani Generis* (August 12, 1950) | PIUS XII. Accessed February 28, 2019. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_l-xiii\\_enc\\_15051891\\_rerum-novarum.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum.html).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*

says here is that the NHC is subordinate to humanity. He is not the only prominent theological figure to go that direction, “[John Calvin] sees the God who provides for the whole creation as caring wonderfully for the human being who is God’s special creature.”<sup>27</sup> The relationship we gather from this set of stances then is one of inherent superiority. NHC has a purpose but only insofar as its capacity to be used and manipulated by humanity. This school of thought is engaged by many lay scholars on the grounds of the term *Dominion*.

One could read and interpret what it means to have dominion in terms of what it means to be in the image and likeness of god. The word dominion derives from the Latin root dominus meaning lord.<sup>28</sup>

This definition in and of itself is not bad. In fact, most would say that this is a pretty stellar way to view the natural world. The problem lies not in the definition, but in the imperfect understanding of it.

The human tendency is to cut and form God to their image: to turn God into the lord one would wish God to be – powerful, controlling, and fearsome – rather than recognizing God as the kind of lord he revealed himself to be: loving righteous and self-sacrificing.<sup>29</sup>

Humanity, after the fall, is seemingly incapable of living the proper form of dominion, and thus, the use of the word has arguably contributed to a sense of natural domination instead of a concept of loving lordship; authentic dominion.

In *Pacem in Terris*, by Pope John XXIII we see the beginnings of a new school of thought. He discusses the order of the universe, as well as the order of mankind.

He made all things, and filled them with the fullness of His own wisdom and goodness. Hence, these are the words the holy psalmist used in praise of God: "O Lord, our Lord: how admirable is

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<sup>27</sup> Edwards, Denis. *Christian Understandings of Creation: The Historical Trajectory*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017. Kindle. LOC. 3078

<sup>28</sup> Smith, Randall. "Creation and the Environment in the Hebrew Scriptures: a Transvaluation of Values." In *Green Discipleship: Catholic Theological Ethics and the Environment*. 74-92. Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2011. Pg. 87

<sup>29</sup> Ibid pg. 89

thy name in the whole earth!" And elsewhere he says: "How great are thy works, O Lord! Thou hast made all things in wisdom."<sup>30</sup>

An underlying theme of this passage, as you may have noticed, is the wisdom and goodness of God's entire creation. "All created being reflects the infinite wisdom of God. It reflects it all the more clearly, the higher it stands in the scale of perfection."<sup>31</sup> As expressed by Pope John XXII, human kind is expressly dominant over creation, but creation exists on a spectrum of goodness and perfection below it. It is not solely for the use of humans, but is created also in the wisdom of God – good, and very good – respectively. What we see in lay contributions in this school of thought is more inclusive. "Though one creature may be superior to another, no creature is superior to the universe as a whole."<sup>32</sup> This insinuates that there is order in creation with humanity at the top and the NHC below, however the glory of God is better seen within the context of the entire creation, and not just in one specific grouping. The relationship then is one of ordered dominion. However, most dissention with this encyclical is found in the fact that it does nothing to engage the perversion of dominion to domination.

The third treatment of nature then, can be seen by Pope Paul VI in "Populorum Progressio". "In the very first pages of Scripture we read these words: "Fill the earth and subdue it."<sup>33</sup> Perhaps this is the most popular dominion example. However, it is at this point that we start to see a re-emergence of a Pope Leo method of natural ordering. Paul VI identifies a combination of what has been said by the previous Popes.

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<sup>30</sup>John XXIII. "Pacem in Terris." *Humani Generis* (August 12, 1950) | PIUS XII. Accessed February 28, 2019. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_j-xxiii\\_enc\\_11041963\\_pacem.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem.html).

<sup>31</sup> *ibid*

<sup>32</sup> Scheid, Daniel P. "Saint Thomas Aquinas, the Thomistic Tradition, and the Cosmic Common Good." In *Green Discipleship: Catholic Theological Ethics and the Environment*, 129-149. Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2011. pg 137

<sup>33</sup> Paul VI. "Populorum Progressio." *Humani Generis* (August 12, 1950) | PIUS XII. Accessed February 28, 2019. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_enc\\_26031967\\_populorum.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum.html).

This teaches us that the whole of creation is for man, that he has been charged to give it meaning by his intelligent activity, to complete and perfect it by his own efforts and to his own advantage.<sup>34</sup>

He first acknowledges human dominion, and human superiority via rationality. But unlike Leo he seems to take for granted the inherent goodness of the NHC. Saying the human mission is to *perfect* and *complete* for his own ends, not simply use in whatever way we want to. This would insinuate that though the natural world is still to be ‘tamed’ it is not without its God ordained goodness before humanity touches it. This, I believe, is a big development for a Catholic natural theology. However, this concept is not without its flaws. “A consequence of viewing all creation as ordered and subject to human life is to relegate NHC to a status that is instrumental rather than intrinsically good.”<sup>35</sup> While Paul certainly brings advancement to teaching on NHC – he even begins to engage the dominion question – it leaves many dissatisfied with his seemingly apathetic stances on the utility based value of the NHC.

Pope John Paul II continues this concept in his common declaration with the Ecumenical Patriarch. “Almighty God envisioned a world of beauty and harmony, and He created it, making every part an expression of His freedom, wisdom and love (cf. Gen 1:1-25).”<sup>36</sup> John Paul II, by saying this, is confirming the natural created goodness of nature itself. In wisdom, love, and freedom, God created each thing as it was meant to be. Not simply as a resource base for human consumption.

At the centre of the whole of creation, He placed us, human beings, with our inalienable human dignity... we have been placed by God in the world in order to cooperate with Him in realizing more and more fully the divine purpose for creation.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid

<sup>35</sup> Mescher, Marcus. "Neighbor to Nature." *In Green Discipleship: Catholic Theological Ethics and the Environment*, 200-219. Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2011. Pg. 202

<sup>36</sup> Pope John Paul II "COMMON DECLARATION OF JOHN PAUL II AND THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH HIS HOLINESS BARTHOLOMEW I." A Joint Declaration. June 10, 2010. Accessed February 12, 2019.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid

John Paul II is in essence arguing that in God's image we are called to 'perfect' or 'complete' creation, just as Paul VI argues. Except, for John Paul II, the ends are not solely human necessity but, "in realizing more and more fully the divine purpose for creation."<sup>38</sup> He then insinuates that the natural environment does in fact have a purpose outside of simple human consumption. "God entrusted to us [the natural environment] to guard with wisdom and love (cf. Gen 1:28)."<sup>39</sup> We are to respect and guard the rest of the creation, rather than simply using our dominion over it for our own gain. Of course, He does not simply say that human dominion is disparaged. "Respect for creation stems from respect for human life and dignity."<sup>40</sup> This clause allows us to see that humanity has a definite superiority to nature. The world has an order and we are on top, but that doesn't mean we aren't to respect it for its inherent goodness and Godliness. We are, in fact, supposed to help more fully realize the creative tendencies of our creator. Through his work however, humanity is still far and away the sole purpose and ends of Gods creative power. It is this concept that will get addressed by later theological thinkers.

The next thoughts are contributed by Pope Benedict XVI.

Respect for creation is of immense consequence, not least because 'creation is the beginning and the foundation of all God's works ... the covenant between human beings and the environment should mirror the creative love of God, from whom we come and towards whom we are journeying.'<sup>41</sup>

Benedict is setting the NHC onto higher ground, acknowledging that the earth demands our respect; we have a covenant with nature that should reflect the one we have with God. He even goes as far as outright discussing the issue of the perversion of human dominion. "Human beings

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid

<sup>39</sup> Ibid

<sup>40</sup> Ibid

<sup>41</sup> Benedict, XVI. "If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation: Message for the 2010 World Day of Peace." In *Green Discipleship: Catholic Theological Ethics and the Environment*, 60-74. Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2011. Pg. 61

let themselves be mastered by selfishness; they misunderstood the meaning of God's command and exploited creation out of a desire to exercise absolute domination over it."<sup>42</sup> Benedict sees the NHC is something that is to be taken care of and respected as a part of God's will, and not just as something to be used.

In Nature, the believer recognizes the wonderful result of God's creative activity which we may use responsibly to satisfy our legitimate needs, material or otherwise, while respecting the intrinsic balance of creation.<sup>43</sup>

The natural world to Benedict, has value, which we must respect as we realize it comes to us from God. That value flows not inherently from the NHC however. "Our duties to the environment flow from our duties towards the person, considered both individually and in relation to another."<sup>44</sup> While Benedict certainly contributes greatly to the relational aspect of Humanity and NHC, as well as the value of NHC, it is this last point that is engaged more closely by Pope Francis, alongside other recent lay theologians.

In *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis directly calls attention to humanity's dominion 'misconceptions' saying, "We are not God."<sup>45</sup> He then goes on – like a few of the Popes before him – to acknowledge the misinterpretations of scripture.

It is true that we Christians have at times incorrectly interpreted the Scriptures, nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God's image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid pg.64

<sup>43</sup> Austriaco, Niconar Pier Giorgio. "Living the Natural Moral Law and Respecting the Ecological Good." *In Green Discipleship: Catholic Theological Ethics and the Environment*, 150-162. Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2011. Pg. 157

<sup>44</sup> Benedict, XVI. "If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation: Message for the 2010 World Day of Peace." *In Green Discipleship: Catholic Theological Ethics and the Environment*, 60-74. Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2011. Pg. 70

<sup>45</sup> Pope Francis "Laudato Si'." *Laudato Si'*. May 24, 2015. Accessed February 12, 2019.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid

Francis, after acknowledging this perversion, continues on to discuss the ordered goodness of creation, “By virtue of our unique dignity and our gift of intelligence, we are called to respect creation and its inherent laws, for “the Lord by wisdom founded the earth” (*Prov 3:19*).”<sup>47</sup> He insinuates that Humanity has a special place, however, unlike every other pope, Francis denies that this place is inherently superior to the NHC.

In our time, the Church does not simply state that other creatures are completely subordinated to the good of human beings, as if they have no worth in themselves and can be treated as we wish.<sup>48</sup> He then goes on to bring up his most radical ideas, and perhaps his greatest contributions to the conversation by saying simply,

We are called to recognize that other living beings have a value of their own in God’s eyes: “by their mere existence they bless him and give him glory”, and indeed, “the Lord rejoices in all his works” (*Ps 104:31*) ... The German bishops have taught that, where other creatures are concerned, “we can speak of the priority of *being* over that of *being useful*”.<sup>49</sup>

Francis, in this statement is acknowledging the inherent dignity of the NHC. Saying its value stems not from its uses to humanity but rather from the sheer fact that it is created by God. The NHC has value in and of itself. Other contemporary thinkers have jumped on board with this concept of value, contributing other statements such as: “Creation has intrinsic value”<sup>50</sup>, or more in depth,

All creatures are intrinsically good because they have been created and preserved by God; and they have a particular set of aptitudes by which they may return to God and fulfilling those inclinations or appetites glorifies God.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid

<sup>48</sup> Ibid

<sup>49</sup> Ibid

<sup>50</sup> Bushlack, Thomas. "A New Heaven and a New Earth: Creation in the New Testament." In *Green Discipleship: Catholic Theological Ethics and the Environment*, 93-115. Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2011. Pg. 108

<sup>51</sup> Scheid, Daniel P. "Saint Thomas Aquinas, the Thomistic Tradition, and the Cosmic Common Good." In *Green Discipleship: Catholic Theological Ethics and the Environment*, 129-149. Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2011 pg.

Overall, each scholar that contributes to this conversation adds a new dimension to our greater understanding.

Nothing in this world exists, lives, and moves of itself. Everything exists lives and moves in others, in one another, with one another, for one another, in the cosmic interrelationship of the divine spirit.<sup>52</sup>

What we see from just a glimpse of these contributions is such that the NHC, since it is created also in goodness by our loving Creator, since it is, “so greatly interconnected to ourselves”<sup>53</sup>, and since it participates in the worship of God, by its intrinsic ability to glorify the creator through natural processes and dispositions, we must renew our conceptions of what our relationship with the NHC really is.

In summary, we see that through doctrine and through the words of other theological thinkers, over time, there is slow progress to a more mutual relationship between the NHC and humanity. Leading up to current schools of thought – propagated by Francis – that allow the NHC to participate in the worship of God (by the simple act of being), as well as in having their own intrinsic value outside of their strict use to humanity.

As you may have noticed, this chain of thoughts is almost directly counter to that of the scientific revolution and to the flow of ideas that come from the history of reading scripture and the natural world. What was stripped and deemed meaningless by secular forces and modern science, over time, was given intrinsic value and meaning by the Church.

As the institution and body of the church then, it is necessary to engage this concept. What is it about the secular forces that the church is negating? What does this new value mean

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<sup>52</sup> Edwards, Denis. *Christian Understandings of Creation: The Historical Trajectory*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017. Kindle. LOC 4005

<sup>53</sup> Pope Francis "Laudato Si'." *Laudato Si'*. May 24, 2015. Accessed February 12, 2019.



for humanity and for the NHC? What are we called to do to help propagate the value of the NHC that has been redacted by the scientific revolution, and yet found in the Church? To answer these questions, we must first understand exactly what this new relationship means, and the best way of understanding that, is through relationship models.

### ***Relationship Models***

The model is the easiest and most concise way to represent an idea. Like a poet using metaphors to display the beauty of a winter night, the relationship model allows us to see the intricacy and balance of the relationship of the NHC and Humanity. We will look at several of these models, namely: the ladder model, the bush model, and the revisited body model.

#### ***The Ladder Model***

The ladder model is the model I believe most people assume when they think of the relationship between the NHC and Humanity. It is expressly dominion-based and offers extreme human superiority. The ladder model shows the creation as a ladder with humanity being the highest rung. The lower pedestals represent the ordered creation, all along a chain of hierarchy. The point of the ladder is that everything below the highest rung is designed to support the top one, where the top is the ultimate goal, it is the capitulation of the ladder. In this model then, humanity is the main event, the end all be all goal of creation, and the remaining creation's point is simply to support humanity as a subservient. This model has its benefits, if indeed, "we are rational linguistic logical beings and therefore unlike all other animals"<sup>54</sup>, then we deserve a place that is distinct from the remainder of creation. However, if we are to take seriously the

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<sup>54</sup> McFague, Sallie. *The Body of God: An Ecological Theory*. London: SCM Press, 1993. Kindle. LOC 1649

developments of Pope Francis on the dignity of the NHC, as well as the contributions of natural science:

One of the most critical house rules we must learn is that we are not lords over the planet but products of its processes; in fact, we are the product of a fifteen-billion-year history of the universe and a four-billion-year history of our earth.<sup>55</sup>

then, we come to realize that such a structure does not accurately represent the current state of our interactions with the NHC. “The problem lies in a tyrannical anthropology. We loom so large in our own minds that we block out the others around us.”<sup>56</sup> The ladder does not take seriously the intrinsic value of the NHC, neither does it acknowledge the NHC as important apart from their *use* to humanity. Sallie McFague, then, offers us a different model. The aptly named “Bush Model”.

### *The Bush Model*

What Mcfague identifies is the problem of the ladder model is in line with what Francis identifies in *laudato si*, namely the – incorrect – assumption of the inherent subservience of the NHC.

What is significant, however, for an anthropology is not only the continuity from the simplest events in the universe to the most complex but also the inverse dependency, which undercuts any sense of absolute superiority.<sup>57</sup>

The bush model attempts to reconcile the sense of interdependence and mutuality that is not present in the ladder model. In the model she provides, each created being is a different part of a bush, where each grows in a separate identity, each is interconnected in a very intimate way. There is no clear superiority of any creature, and the creation, in togetherness, flourishes. She

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid LOC 192

<sup>56</sup> JOHNSON, ELIZABETH A. *CREATION AND THE CROSS: The Mercy of God for a Planet in Peril*. ORBIS, 2019. Kindle. LOC 3069

<sup>57</sup>McFague, Sallie. *The Body of God: An Ecological Theory*. London: SCM Press, 1993. Kindle. LOC 1473

acknowledges that this model is appropriate given the state of knowledge we have gained through natural science. “What postmodern science is telling us is that the universe is a whole and that all things, living and nonliving, are interrelated and interdependent.”<sup>58</sup> The point of the bush, is to grow outwardly toward the greater area around it; the point of creation is to be oriented outwards towards God. Her model is in agreement with Saint Bonaventure’s concepts of the NHC. “Every single creature from a grain of sand to the angel has its direct model and foundation in the world. Each being is equally close to God.”<sup>59</sup>

While this model is certainly an improvement, and more accurately represents the current state of the NHC-humanity relationship, it lacks several things. The first is that though this model mentions a vector – it shows nature moving towards God – it lacks the intimacy necessary to portray that relationship. Secondly, while it is important that a mutual relationship is emphasized, it completely ignores the place of the human as steward, as well as, the whole, ‘made in the image and likeness’ part of the creation narrative. Humanity does not have a place that is any different from a rock in this model. For these reasons, it is necessary to look at a new model, my own model, which I named the Revisited Body Model

### ***The Revisited Body Model***

Though Aquinas is correct when he says, “no one creature can adequately express and represent this divine image and exemplar,”<sup>60</sup> this model is still going to be based off of the human body. As the image and likeness of God, it is only appropriate that the model that

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid LOC 509

<sup>59</sup> Edwards, Denis. *Christian Understandings of Creation: The Historical Trajectory*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017. Kindle. LOC 2009

<sup>60</sup> Edwards, Denis. *Christian Understandings of Creation: The Historical Trajectory*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017. Kindle. LOC 2466

displays God's creation is represented by just that, as well as the fact that the human body is familiar and easily relatable. It is inspired by Origen, "the cosmos is a huge animate being held together by one soul."<sup>61</sup> This model, takes the advantages from both the ladder and the bush model, citing the interrelatedness of all creation, but also not ignoring the specialized – not superior – place, that humanity has within it.

The creation is seen as the many parts of the human body, the cells, the muscles, the bones, the feet... all of it. Humanity, in this system is what makes up the brain.

In our current picture, God is understood as a continuing creator [evolution] but of equal importance we human beings might be seen as partners in creation as the self-conscious, reflexive, part of the creation, that could participate in furthering the process.<sup>62</sup>

The brain is what named itself. It named, and continues to name all of the parts of the body, of which it is a part of. However special the brain may be, however, without the heart it would fail to function. Without the rest of the body, the brain would simply be a weirdly shaped blob of muscle. If the body as a whole was missing even one big toe, the whole body would be out of balance. Therefore, the body of creation is valued for each and every portion, it is all mutually dependent. This model still allows for the consciousness of the human as a rational being, and still allows for humanity to be made in a distinct way, without making us superior to the remainder of creation.

You shall not see your brother's donkey or his ox fallen down by the way and withhold your help... If you chance to come upon a bird's nest in any tree or on the ground, with young ones or eggs and the mother sitting upon the young or upon the eggs; you shall not take the mother with the young" (*Dt* 22:4, 6). Along these same lines, rest on the seventh day is meant not only for human beings, but also so "that your ox and your donkey may have rest" (*Ex* 23:12). Clearly, the Bible has no place for a tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> McFague, Sallie. *The Body of God: An Ecological Theory*. London: SCM Press, 1993. Kindle. LOC 522

<sup>62</sup> Ibid LOC 1453

<sup>63</sup> Francis "Laudato Si'." *Laudato Si'*. May 24, 2015. Accessed February 12, 2019.

This model corrects the bush models lack of distinction on human consciousness. Next then, the question on the intimacy of the Creator with the creation, is to be addressed.

When broken down to its most basic element the community of creation bespeaks the truth that all beings in this evolving world are in fact creatures sustained in life by the creator.<sup>64</sup>

In the Revisited body model, as well as in the scriptures, the Creator is the breath of life. Each breath taken by the body in unison, is filled with the glory of God, the sustaining power of the Creators love. Without breath, the body would simply cease to function. In order for the body to take in and use the breath of God however, every part of that body must be functioning correctly. Once more, everything is dependent on everything else in order to receive the full glory of God.

It is for these reasons that I believe the revisited body model is a more apt description of what modern science, as well as contemporary theologians, have discovered our relationship, both with the NHC, and with God entail. With this model in mind, and this relationship discussed sufficiently for a greater understanding of what it all exactly means, it is necessary to discuss the potential effects of these relationships.

### *Implications of a New Disposition*

The directional shift found from this new found relationship is easily summarized by the following:

Humans are to see other creatures as kin, within a community of creation before God, where each creature has its own intrinsic value.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> JOHNSON, ELIZABETH A. *CREATION AND THE CROSS: The Mercy of God for a Planet in Peril*. ORBIS, 2019. Kindle. LOC 3119

<sup>65</sup> Edwards, Denis. *Christian Understandings of Creation: The Historical Trajectory*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017. Kindle. LOC 5080

The implications of such a renewal are just as simple. Just as you would be more willing to help your brother if you saw him on the side of the road with a flat tire than you would be willing to help a random stranger; we should be more willing to lovingly protect and care for the NHC that is our kin instead of our subservient. The direction that has been pointed to us by this developing relationship is pointing directly at environmental stewardship.

If we take what has been explored in the remainder of this analysis to be true, then it is also necessary that we act on the new direction that it is leading us to; for what is knowledge of the light of Christ if it isn't authentically lived out? In laymen's terms, this new model, and the disposition it has set us into, calls us to one action. That action is to care for our fellow creatures – the NHC – in the same way that we are called to treat humanity. Namely, this entails loving unconditionally and with an open heart. We do this to better know the God that so lovingly created all of creation, and so that we can all properly worship that same Creator by using the talents and inherent traits that God gave us (the whole creation).

More realistically and practically, this concept can come to fruition in many ways, but chief among them is simply to be aware of the NHC as important. It is imperative to realize that the NHC is loved just as you are loved. This sense of awareness will bring about an internal change, that in turn, will produce external change. These changes could be anywhere from a more sustainable lifestyle and habits of cleaning out litter, all the way to things as simple as planting trees with love for their own goodness rather than out of a strict desire for its fruit.

The church, as an institution, is called to advance this view as well. In tension with the modern concepts of the utility of the NHC, the church has to play a big role in a transition of thought. Though the Church is inherently a political machine, it may not be the role of its higher structure to advance specific policies. More aptly the church should feel called to change hearts

and dispositions so that political institutions such as government, can be changed internally and more permanently. The Church has a role then, in providing the important reasons as to why the followers of Christ are called to live out this new relationship, of why they are called to love the NHC as their neighbor, of why they are called to live sustainably. If the Church accepts to be true what its theologians and its Popes have been saying – the value and dignity of the NHC – then its mission needs to be to bring attention to this shift.

### *Concluding Remarks*

Through this paper I have attempted to show several things. First, I discussed the transition of thought on the interpretations of the book of scripture as well as the book of nature. Next, I showed the progression of the Church, through encyclicals as well as lay theologians from early Christianity to modern day, of the place of the NHC. Through these two historical explorations we find that the Church and the scientific revolution have an inverse relationship. Next, I displayed several models of the relationship between the NHC and humanity, and discuss why the revisited body model is the most apt description. Lastly, I discussed what this model means, as well as some possible outcomes of the disposition we are being called to hold in our hearts.

What is shown in this analysis is simple. That because, “we are all made of the ashes of dead stars”<sup>66</sup>, because we are all interconnected, and most importantly, because the NHC has *intrinsic* value, we as humanity, are called to treat the NHC as what both the NHC and we as humans really are – Beloved creatures of God.

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<sup>66</sup> McFague, Sallie. *The Body of God: An Ecological Theory*. London: SCM Press, 1993. Kindle. LOC 682

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