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LIT

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PROLOGUE

*God
You also lead our spirit
into the vastness of the world
into the density of life.*

*Weave wisdom in us
and with wisdom
the joy of living.*

Hildegard of Bingen, Symphonia 137

From August 25 to 28, 2021, the Congress of the European Society for Catholic Theology (ESCT) on the theme *Creation – Transformation – Theology* took place at the University of Osnabrück. In difficult times of the worldwide Covid 19 pandemic, but also of many other social, political, economic and ecological crises, about 120 colleagues from different European countries came to Osnabrück, members of the Society, but also others interested in the topic. Additionally, about 100 people from the sections of the ESCT, but also from more remote countries such as Australia, the Philippines, Argentina, Chile or the USA participated via digital media.

In view of the great ecological challenges of the present, the congress offered a platform for a philosophical, theological and interdisciplinary reflection on questions of creation and transformation in connection with insights into political-social and church practice contexts such as the movement Christians for Future. Immediately before the congress, the floods in Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and France, the forest fires in Greece, Turkey, Italy, France, North Africa and North America, as well as the publication of the Sixth IPCC Assessment Report (World Climate Report) have once again brought to light the “precipice” on which we stand in a global perspective.

The limits of the current ways of life – in Europe and also worldwide – and the associated vulnerability of all life have become even more conscious through the Corona pandemic, which has accompanied and shaped the preparations for the congress. In the secular context, “apocalyptic” crisis scenarios have increased, and it is precisely here that enlightenment through philosophy and theology helps to question anew what life is based on and what gives future and meaning to human existence. And so, the perspectives on these questions, which philosophy and theology have opened up in the different epochs of history, can be brought into conversation anew, and precisely their critical and “stirring” questions can be recalled: It will not be possible – even if this desire is understandable after months of lockdown – to return to a “normality”, because it does not exist in such a way. The war in Ukraine that broke out on February 24, 2022 shows exactly this. Life means to look at the realities of life with alert eyes. Life from a Christian spirit

does not stand for a “normality”, but for a life that has always understood to look at the abysses of the world and the human heart.

What does the cross ultimately stand for? What does the resurrection stand for? Certainly not for any “normality”, even defined from a Western perspective, but for the attention to the newness of God’s creation that can break through at any moment.

This is the broad horizon into which the various essays in this publication, which grew out of lectures in the main program and in the workshops of the congress, are inscribed. The contributions span the arc from philosophical-theological fundamental questions to the practice of sustainability and creation spirituality. In doing so, the theological work in Europe will be brought together with regard to the topic of the congress and the view from liberation-theological-ecological and indigenous perspectives which broaden the perspective to global developments. The aim of the congress and of this publication was and is to bring together the perspectives worked out in the different theological disciplines to a new, innovative and practically relevant theology of creation and ethics of sustainability and thus to contribute to the necessary “transformation” of Catholic theology in a global perspective – in the sense of a performative and liberating theology.

The congress was not possible without the support of many: First of all, I would like to thank the President of the University of Osnabrück, Professor Susanne Menzel, that we were able to hold the congress of the ESCT in times of the pandemic at the University of Osnabrück; her greeting at the beginning of the congress is included in the first section of the present volume. Above all, I would like to thank the active support of many staff members at the Institute of Catholic Theology: Dr. Sebastian Salaske in the preparatory phase for the congress in 2020, in view of the development of the program and the application for funding by the GERMAN FEDERAL ENVIRONMENTAL FOUNDATION (Deutsche Bundesumweltstiftung – DBU, Osnabrück), Mrs. Nikola Götzl in the second phase of the intensive preparation and the realization of the congress in 2021; Mrs. Götzl also coordinated the team of student and research assistants in the realization of the congress and accompanied the various reports and work in the phase after the congress. Without the generous funding by the DBU, the realization of this congress would not have been possible; I thank Dr. Pyhel and his staff at the DBU for their friendly and constructive support and interest in the theological and philosophical perspectives of the congress. I would also like to thank the Solidarity Initiative of the German Catholics with the people in Central and Eastern Europe RENOVABIS, through whose financial support participants from Eastern European countries were given the opportunity to take part in the congress.

The European Society for Catholic Theology (ESCT) was founded in 1989 in times of transformation of the political landscape of Europe. It tries to bring the social, cultural, ecclesiastical and theological developments in the European countries into a dialogue, in the service of a growing together in Europe, especially on the level of ecclesiastical work. Thus, the congress was also accompanied with interest by important representatives of the German local church. I would like to

thank Bishop Dr. Franz-Josef Overbeck (Essen), the delegate of the German bishops in the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (ComECE) and Vice-President of ComECE, for his greeting and his speech at the opening of the Congress. I would also like to thank the Bishop of Osnabrück, Dr. Franz-Josef Bode, for his words of greeting and for celebrating a liturgical service with us in the late afternoon of the second day of the Congress and for preaching a sermon on the theme of the Congress. The Presidium and Board of Trustees of the European Society of Catholic Theology also supported the preparations for this congress with interest, and I thank Prof. Dr. Miloš Lichner SJ, Professor of Biblical and Patristic Theology at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Trnava in Bratislava/Slovakia, for his greeting as then President of the ESCT and his reflections on theological work in Europe.

In the first part of the present publications the opening words of greeting are included, as well as the sermon of Bishop Dr. Franz-Josef Bode and a word of encouragement to the young generation of theologians in Europe by the Honorary President of the ESCT, Prof. Dr. Peter Hünemann, read during the ceremony for the ESCT-award *Theological Book of the Years 2019-2020* (to “established scholars” and young scholars). At the end of the book there is a contribution by the Romanian theologian and classical philologist Claudiu Arieșan, who, through the interpretation of the writing *De Mortibus Persecutorum* by Lactantius, presents a parable of the former totalitarian political regime in Romania which becomes very topical against the background of the war in Ukraine.

I would like to thank Dr. Michael Rainer of LIT-Verlag (Münster) for including the publication in its publishing program and for the good cooperation in the process of preparing the publication; I thank also Prof. Dr. Tonči Matulić (Zagreb) for including the volume in the series Theology East-West. For the competent and reliable support in the preparation of the publication I would like to thank especially my assistant Mr. Severin Parzinger – and of course all colleagues who provided and further edited their congress contributions for this publication.

May this publication make a small contribution to the great goal of setting accents in an interdisciplinary, ecumenical and interreligious exchange for the “transformation” of theology to meet the great ecological challenges and to put theology at the service of education for sustainability, while continuing to “think creation” in intratheological and interdisciplinary scientific exchange. The task of developing the theology of creation, ethics of and education for sustainability to find ways to meet the ecological challenges of our time, also in a practical way, will accompany us in the future.

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Osnabrück, Pentecost 2022

THE CATHOLICITY OF SALVATION AND ITS ECOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Wilibaldus Gaut

This present contribution examines how Christian soteriology could provide the theological underpinnings for Christian concern and discourse on the ecological well-being of creation. The conviction that God's gift of salvation is offered to all creation, and not limited to human beings alone, suggests that salvation cannot be understood solely as the liberation from sin. Rather, it also points to the renewal and transformation of the entire creation in God. This understanding of salvation can be called catholic not only because it shares the all-embracing paradigm, but also because it resonates the basic understanding of catholicity as a theological term, that is the fullness of divine life that God shares with the created reality, the result of which is that the created reality could participate in the divine life. While serving as a critic of an anthropocentric-juridical understanding of salvation, this catholic view of salvation has some deep ecological implications that should shape our view of non-human nature and the way we treat it.

Introduction

Why does ecological concern matter for Christian life? This article seeks to answer this fundamental question from the perspective of Christian soteriology. I would argue that any concern or involvement in manifold efforts to address the ecological crises as one of the most pressing issues of our time is not simply an expression of an ethical commitment. At a more fundamental level, they give expression to a soteriological conviction about the inclusion of all the elements of creation into God's salvific work. Such an understanding of salvation may be called catholic, not only because of its "all-embracing" trait, but more fundamentally because it shares the meaning of catholicity as the participation of creation in the divine life as a result of God sharing the fullness of the divine life with the created reality.

To advance this argument, this article will proceed in two major parts. The first section explores the key elements of the notion of the catholicity of salvation, which include the discussion of the basic concepts of the catholicity of salvation, the Christocentric characteristic of the catholicity of salvation, the eschatological-soteriological fulfilment of creation, and the notion of the catholicity of salvation in comparison with an anthropocentric-juridical understanding of salvation. The second section considers some ecological implications of the catholicity of salvation, ranging from the principle of the intrinsic goodness

and of non-exploitation of creation, a plea for the preservation of the diversity of creation, and the idea of the interconnectedness and mutual custodianship among the elements of creation.

1. The catholicity of salvation: key elements

1.1 *Catholicity and the notion of salvation as recapitulation*

The term catholicity is derived from the Greek adjective *katholikos* that means “universal”, and the adverb *kath’ holou* which means “on the whole” or “according to the whole”.¹ As Avery Dulles points out, based on such an etymological understanding, the notion of catholicity represents both the idea of “extensive universality” and “qualitative wholeness”.² It should be noted, however, that the concept of universality or wholeness here by no means denotes a kind of totality that effaces the place of every individuality or particularity. As Henry de Lubac notes, while catholicity puts forth “the idea of an organic whole, of a cohesion, of a firm synthesis of a reality”, it speaks of an integral whole that maintains its “internal differentiation”.³ Catholicity therefore speaks of an integral wholeness that presupposes the diversity of its constituting elements. Even more so, catholicity points to the idea of a fullness that manifests itself in a wide range of its constituting elements.⁴

As a theological term, the notion of catholicity has been predominantly used to describe one of the marks of the Church according to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. Nonetheless, as Dulles remarks, the primary reference of catholicity as a theological term is not the Church, but rather the relationship between God and creation in general. In this respect, the term catholicity first and foremost suggests the idea of the fullness (*plērōma*) of divine life that God shares with the created reality. The primary meaning of the term catholicity thus points to the fact that God fills heaven and earth (cf. Jer 23:24), the consequence of which is that the whole earth is filled with God’s glory (Is 6:3) and God’s good things (cf. Sir 16:30).⁵

Dulles’s account makes it clear that more than just pointing to God’s willingness to share the fullness of divine life with creation, the term catholicity says something about the possibility of the created reality to participate in the divine life as well. In the course of history, these two poles of meaning contained in the term catholicity echoes the understanding of salvation as recapitulation of creation in and through Christ as its head.⁶ This way, salvation is understood as “communication of and participation in divine life (2 Pet 1:3-4)”, and thus the

¹ MCBRIEN, *Catholicism*, 3.

² DULLES, *The Catholicity of the Church*, 14.

³ DE LUBAC, *The Motherhood of the Church*, 174

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ DULLES, *The Catholicity of the Church*, 31.

⁶ Cf. GALVIN, *Jesus Christ*, 275.

salvific moment is that of “the perfection of creation”.⁷ The biblical terms used to depict this salvific moment are “new creation” and “new heavens and new earths” (cf. Is 65:17-18; 66:22; 2 Cor 5:17; 2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1-8). This implies that while God shares the divine life with the created reality, the participation of the creation in the divine life finds its fulfilment only in the eschaton.

All this leads to the conclusion that the notion of the catholicity of salvation, which results from the interplay between the basic understanding of the term catholicity and salvation as recapitulation, can be perceived in two ways. *Firstly*, the idea of salvation as recapitulation is called catholic thanks to the inclusion of all creation in God’s salvific work, and thus represents the *all-embracing paradigm*, which is the very meaning of the term catholic.⁸ *Secondly*, and more fundamentally, the notion of salvation as recapitulation shares the idea of catholicity as a theological concept, i.e., the fullness of divine life that God wants to share with the entire creation, which results in the possibility of creation to participate in the divine life. When salvation is understood in this way, however, what is then the role of Christ as the redeemer? To address this question, I will now turn to the Christocentric characteristic of the catholicity of salvation.

1.2 The christocentric characteristic of the catholicity of salvation

From the perspective of catholicity, salvation is best perceived as “the holistic work of God bringing not only individuals, but all of society and all of creation to their intended end”.⁹ Thus, all the created reality is on the way to its ultimate end. Dulles calls this eschatological fulfilment of salvation as “the catholicity of God”, namely God who fully permeates the entire creation and in so doing brings into completion its participation in the divine life.¹⁰ To support this argument, Dulles appeals to Teilhard de Chardin. In de Chardin’s cosmology, this event is called pleromization, that is “the mystery of creation union in God”, which takes place as the completion of the whole process ranging from creation, incarnation, and redemption.¹¹

According to de Chardin, Christ plays an indispensable role in the moment of pleromization, hence his idea of *Christogenesis* is significant in understanding his cosmological reflection. “If the world is convergent and if Christ occupies its center”, de Chardin writes, it follows that *Christogenesis* serves both as the

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Cf. DULLES, *The Catholicity of the Church*, 3.

⁹ GONZALES, *A Concise History of Christian Doctrine*, 186.

¹⁰ DULLES, *The Catholicity of the Church*, 36f.

¹¹ DE CHARDIN, *Christianity and Evolution*, 182-183. Elsewhere in the same work, de Chardin calls this pleromization as “mutual completion of world and God”; *ibid.*, 227. Pointing to the same idea, Miroslav Volf uses the term “reciprocal dwelling” of the triune God and the world. See VOLF, *Catholicity of ‘Two or Three’*, 531.

extension of *noogenesis* and the culmination of *cosmogenesis*.¹² Pondering the indispensable role of Christ in the ultimate end of creation, de Chardin convincingly argues that Christ has not only divine and human nature but cosmic nature as well.¹³ In other words, Christ is truly divine and human, and at the same time, He is indeed part of the cosmic reality in its wholeness. I shall revisit this idea later when discussing the cosmic dimension of salvation in comparison with the anthropocentric-juridical view of salvation.

De Chardin's emphasis on Christ as the ultimate end of all creation should not come as a surprise given its solid biblical grounds. In Pauline letters, for instance, this issue is quite central. As José Morales attempts to sketch out, the major emphases in Paul's creation theology seem to proceed in the following threefold aspect.¹⁴ The first focuses on the role of Christ as the firstborn of creation (Col 1:15), which accentuates "the ontological and cosmological superiority of the Word over all creation."¹⁵ The second deals with the role of Christ as a mediator (1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:16), in which Christ is recognized "as the mediator of creation, just as he is the mediator of salvation."¹⁶ The third examines Christ as the goal of creation (Col 1:17), the eschatological consummation of all creation. With this, in Morales's view, it is asserted that "Jesus Christ is the eschatological Lord of all creation, or he is the hidden goal of all creation, the final cause of everything."¹⁷ How this eschatological moment of the completion of all creation in Christ should be perceived will be treated in the following section.

1.3 The eschatological-soteriological fulfilment of creation

The foregoing discussion suggests that all the elements of the created reality are on the way toward completion of its salvific experience, i.e., the moment in which "God becomes all in all" (1 Cor 15:28). In his further account of pleromization, de Chardin explains that at this eschatological moment, the cre-

¹² DE CHARDIN, *The Phenomenon of Man*, 297; DE CHARDIN, *The Heart of Matter*, 94-95. De Chardin's basic assumption is that the whole universe, i.e. the cosmos, is in the process of evolution, hence the concept of cosmogenesis. The cosmic elements move towards increasing complexity that ultimately amounts to the emergence of a full self-conscious spirit, which is also called noogenesis. This process continues until it reaches its culmination in Christ. De Chardin believes that spirit is the higher form of matter, or to be more precise, the spirit is the heart and the future of matter. So, the cosmogenesis that culminates in Christ is an evolution from matter to life, and then from life to spirit. For a concise explanation of de Chardin's cosmology, see EDWARDS, *Christian Understandings of Creation*, 191-210.

¹³ DE CHARDIN, *The Heart of Matter*, 93.

¹⁴ MORALES, *Creation Theology*, 33-37.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 35. This is not to say that these three roles of Christ are to be found only in Pauline writings. The same reflection of the role of Christ in the creation is also found in the Johannine writings. Christ is recognized as the origin and the end of creation (Apoc 22:13; John 1:1-2) and also as the mediator of all creation (John 1:3); *Ibid.*, 38-40; Cf. DULLES, *The Catholicity of the Church*, 36-37.

ated reality is “restored to its true place”.¹⁸ The idea of cosmic redemption therefore affirms that the elements of creation do not end in vain for they are on the way towards renewal and transformation, which according to Dulles is a fundamental desire of every creation. Following St. Paul, Dulles remarks that the entire creation is subject to futility and awaits redemption, that fully takes place once they reach their consummation in God and undergo renewal and transformation (cf. Rom. 8:18-21).¹⁹

In his study of the development of the interpretation of the biblical terms used to describe the recapitulation of all creation in God, Denis Edwards has come to conclude that with this renewal, “the original creation is not to be annihilated but wonderfully transfigured in the new creation.”²⁰ Such a statement is decisively important, especially when considered in the light of de Chardin’s view of pleromization. The moment of God becoming all in all, de Chardin argues, should be looked upon as “unity in plurality”, for “the unification of beings in God cannot be conceived as being effected by fusion”, but “by ‘differentiating’ synthesis, with the elements of the world becoming more themselves, the more they converge on God”.²¹ One may find another aspect of the understanding of catholicity in this statement, for it clearly reflects what Miroslav Volf calls the paradox of the catholicity of God’s new creation, in that “it signifies a totality (*holos*), but it always exists as a particularity”.²² In the succeeding section, I will briefly explain how the conviction of the catholicity of salvation serves as a critique of the anthropocentric-juridical category of salvation.

1.4 Going beyond the Anthropocentric-juridical category of salvation

Key to the understanding of salvation from the perspective of catholicity is the cosmic characteristic of redemption as it emphasizes the inclusion of all elements of creation in God’s salvific work. An insight of Dulles sheds further light on this matter. Inspired by the 1947 document “The Anglican Report on *Catholicity*”, Dulles is critical of the idea of redemption as merely a liberation from sin. As he strongly insists, “the redemptive action of God ought to be studied not simply in the quasi-juridical categories of justification and imputation, but also in the ontological categories of creation and re-creation”.²³ Such a view is also central to Karl Rahner’s soteriology. For Rahner, the salvation of God

¹⁸ DE CHARDIN, *Christianity and Evolution*, 198.

¹⁹ DULLES, *The Catholicity of the Church*, 38.

²⁰ EDWARDS, *Christian Understandings of Creation*, 10-11.

²¹ DE CHARDIN, *Christianity and Evolution*, 171. For him, this conviction is precisely the point of rupture between Christian theology and pantheism.

²² VOLF, Catholicity of ‘Two or Three’, 525. Elsewhere in the same article, Volf writes that the eschatological unity is the one that “takes place by means of the acceptance of the particularities of each”; *ibid.*, 531.

²³ DULLES, *The Catholicity of the Church*, 51.

through Christ is to be understood as “the redemption of the world”, that is “the glorification and divinization of the *whole* reality”.²⁴

Being critical of the understanding of salvation as merely a liberation from sin, the notion the catholicity of salvation therefore rejects an anthropocentric view of salvation as a result of seeing it as limited to human beings alone. All elements of creation are included in God’s salvific work. Furthermore, as noted earlier, this has a bearing on the understanding of the redemptive role of Christ. In line with the arguments outlined above, Heidi Russel advocates that the redemptive role of Christ is not to be limited to “a remedy for sin” but rather “as the plan, goal, and culmination to creation”.²⁵ Therefore, as she goes on to say, “Christ is the plan and goal of all creation, not only humanity”.²⁶ Anne Clifford follows up the same line of thinking. Explaining that Jesus is the beginning and the ultimate end of creation, Clifford claims that “more than God’s human emissary, Jesus is the cosmic Christ”.²⁷ In the second part of this article, I will examine the implications that the idea of the catholicity of salvation has on the way we perceive and treat the entire elements of creation.

2. Some ecological implications of the notion of the catholicity of salvation

2.1 *The principle of the intrinsic goodness and non-exploitation of creation*

The foregoing discussion shows that the basic understanding of catholicity as a theological term resonates with the idea of salvation as recapitulation. The interconnection between these two theological concepts lays the foundation for the principle of the intrinsic goodness of creation in two ways. In the first place, these two convictions signify the intrinsic goodness of creation, which comes about because of God sharing the divine goodness with the world. In her reflection of the universe’s catholicity, Ilia Delio makes this point, noting that the goodness of creation derives from the goodness of God. Creation, Delio argues, “is rooted in the self-diffusive goodness of God’s inner life and emerges out of the innermost depths of divine life”.²⁸ Consequently, the goodness of creation cannot be thought of without taking account of its divine origin, for it is only resulted from the creation’s participation in the divine goodness.²⁹

Secondly, based on the account of the key elements of the catholicity of salvation, one may also add that the goodness of creation pertains not only to its origin but also its end. It is because God, who shares the goodness of the divine life with creation, also invites them to the final completion of their participation

²⁴ RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, 128-129. Italic original.

²⁵ RUSSEL, *The Source of All Love*, 122.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 122-123.

²⁷ CLIFFORD, *Creation*, 213.

²⁸ DELIO, *Making All Things New*, 19.

²⁹ Cf. DULLES, *The Catholicity of the Church*, 32.

in it, i.e., in the eschaton. Accordingly, the ideas of the catholicity and the catholicity of salvation seem to be a general principle of understanding the intent of God's act of creating the world. It should be noted, however, that the principle of the goodness of creation is not to obscure the fact that the elements of creation remain creaturely limited beings. On the contrary, it suggests that the created world is intrinsically and originally good despite its creatureliness and materiality. Put simply, the catholicity of creation accentuates that the goodness of creation is the original intent of God in creating the world, and this created world remains good for it shares God's goodness and are on the way to its completion. The catholicity of creation, as such, gives expression to the basic conviction of what Dulles calls "the impregnation of nature by grace".³⁰

The far-reaching implication of such an idea is particularly notable. The concept of the catholicity of creation provides a framework to overcome the seemingly unreconciled dualism between the sacred and the profane, or the divine and the secular. Because all God's creation shares the divine goodness and on the way to its perfection, it follows that "the goodness of creation extends not simply to those things that are set apart as 'sacred', but to all things".³¹ As a result, the principle of the goodness of creation lifts the total separation between the sacred and the profane, and in so doing, helps to attain a more integral view of creation. In sum, the goodness of creation is a quality embedded in every created being without exception.

The corollary of the principle of the intrinsic goodness of creation is that of non-exploitation of non-human nature.³² If the goodness of creation is the ontological condition of their existence, it follows that the value of each individual creation is not first and foremost defined by its function for the well-being of human beings. Rather, the non-human nature is good and valuable because they share and manifest the goodness of God. All this should be the foundation of a deep respect due to the non-human nature. The recognition of and respect for the intrinsic value that every element of creation has can lay the foundation for rejection of any instrumental way in perceiving and treating the non-human nature, resulting from seeing them merely as resources.³³ This way, the principle of the intrinsic goodness of creation also thwarts any form of excessive exploitation of non-human nature.

Moreover, since the principle of the goodness of creation to describe their ontological condition is also related to their eschatological future, one may argue that the existing created reality does not have their end in this world. Just like human beings, they too are on the way to the eschaton, wherein their participation in the divine life and goodness will come into perfection. In *Laudato Si'*,

³⁰ Ibid., 8.

³¹ BAUERSCHMIDT / BUCKLEY, *Catholic Theology*, 72. On the same page, they add, "because all is God's good creation, nothing can be treated as purely profane."

³² Cf. GILKEY, "Nature as the Image of God," 127; See Pope FRANCIS, *Laudato Si'*, 33; the document is quoted hereafter in the maintext as "LS".

³³ Cf. DEANE-DRUMMOND, *A Primer in Ecotheology*, 31f.

Pope Francis underscores the same conviction. The Pope convincingly says, “all creatures are moving forward with us and through us towards a common point of arrival, which is God, in that transcendent fullness where the risen Christ embraces and illumines all things” (LS 83). Of special significance here is that the Pope then makes use of such a belief as the reason to oppose any form of domination and exploitation of human beings over the other elements of creation.³⁴

2.2 A plea for the Preservation of the Diversity of Creation

Besides the principle of non-exploitation, the catholicity of salvation also lays the foundation for a plea for the preservation of the diversity of creation. Central to the notion of catholicity and the catholicity of salvation is a conviction of the participation of the created reality in the divine life. This, in turn, allows the elements of creation to reflect the divine life. In his reflection on why creation is diverse, Thomas Aquinas contends that God “produced many and diverse creatures, that what was wanting to one in the representation of the divine goodness might be supplied by another”.³⁵ Putting it another way, God is represented or mirrored in all the elements of creation, each in its own way, for the goodness of God is too abundant to be represented only by one single creature, which in itself, is finite and contingent. This line of thinking suggests that diversity is another ontological condition of creation.³⁶

Furthermore, the plea for the preservation of the diversity of creation can be explained in terms of the conviction of the salvific event as the moment of perfection. As outlined before through the concept of the paradox of the catholicity of God’s new creation, such a conviction first and foremost explains that the salvific moment should not be seen as deification. While God permeates the created reality and brings them into renewal and transformation, creation remains creation. The salvific moment should rather be defined as that of creation being brought to its original intention and perfected. This implies that the particularity of every individual creation matters, for each is on its way to be perfected. In other words, each element of creation is on the way to be perfected in the eschaton. In short, the preservation of the diversity of creation could be considered an effort to maintain its ontological condition.³⁷

2.3 The principle of interconnectedness and mutual custodianship

By virtue of their participation and being rooted in the divine life, the created reality has the capacity to build up unity among themselves as the extension of their unity with God. Heidi Russel develops such an argument as she speaks of

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ AQUINAS, *Summa Theologica*, I, 47, 1. In *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis reiterates this point and refers to this passage of Thomas Aquinas (cf. LS 86).

³⁶ Cf. BAUERSCHMIDT / BUCKLEY, *Catholic Theology*, 76.

³⁷ In *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis views the loss of biodiversity as one of the pressing ecological issues and considers exploitation as its cause (cf. LS 32-34).

universe as “an implicate order of wholeness”, of which “a relational God of undivided wholeness is the source and flow”.³⁸ Thus, besides serving as the root, it is the same divine power that maintains the interconnectedness of the elements of creation. Building on Teilhard de Chardin, Russel considers Trinity as “the expansive breadth of divine love embracing, sustaining, and creatively drawing all life into the fullness of unity in love”.³⁹ One can further argue that such an interconnectedness in turn grounds the principle of mutual custodianship. If all the elements of creation are interconnected, then what happens to one of the elements of creation has a bearing on the rest. This means, the well-being of one element of creation is dependent on the well-being of others.

This line of thinking is also central to Pope Francis. He considers the unity of all the elements of creation as representing the trinitarian communion. However, he goes on to emphasize that such an interconnection is not merely something to be appreciative of. Rather, it is at the same time a call to develop a spirituality of solidarity. His account on this is worth citing at length:

“The divine Persons are subsistent relations, and the world, created according to the divine model, is a web of relations. Creatures tend towards God, and in turn it is proper to every living being to tend towards other things, so that throughout the universe we can find any number of and secretly interwoven relationships. This leads us not only to marvel at the manifold connections existing among creatures, but also to discover a key to our own fulfilment. [...] Everything is interconnected, and this invites us to develop a spirituality of that global solidarity which flows from the mystery of the Trinity.” (LS 240)

Conclusion

Throughout this present contribution, I have argued that the claim of the catholicity of salvation is concerned first and foremost with the idea shared by the notion of catholicity as a theological term and the idea of salvation as recapitulation, i.e., the fullness of the divine life that God shares with creation and the participation of creation in the divine life which finds its final completion in the eschaton. Secondly, the catholicity of salvation accentuates the catholic character of the concept of salvation as recapitulation, for it represents “all embracing” paradigm by way of emphasizing that salvation is for all creation, and not for human beings alone. Salvation is therefore perceived in more ontological than juridical category, for it points to the renewal of all creation rather just the liberation from sin. Such a catholic way of understanding salvation lays the foundation for some ecological principles, on which Christian ecological concern can be based. Thus, any involvements in terms of maintaining the well-being of our common cosmos are more than just an ethical concern, for they are first and

³⁸ RUSSEL, *The Source of All Love*, xiv; The same discussion of the work of David Bohm to support the theological reflection of evolution can also be found in DELIO, *The Unbreakable Wholeness of Being*, 27-30; cf. DELIO, *Making All Things New*, 68-70.

³⁹ RUSSEL, *The Source of All Love*, xv.

foremost a manifestation of a soteriological conviction of the catholicity of God's salvific work.

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