

**The Eucharistic Vision of *Laudato Si'*: Praise, Conversion, and Integral Ecology.** By Lucas Briola. Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2023. Pp. 288. Price \$34.95 (hbk). ISBN 9780813235813.

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The Eucharistic Vision of *Laudato Si'* is a compelling and unique examination of Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato Si'*, offering an original eucharistic and doxological lens to understand the integral ecology proposed by the Pope. Since its release in 2015, *Laudato Si'* has sparked significant discussion within the Catholic Church and beyond, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all creation and the urgent need for environmental stewardship. Despite its wide acclaim, the encyclical has also encountered resistance and varied reception, particularly within the polarized context of the US Catholic Church. This variance highlights a critical need for deeper theological reflection on the encyclical's themes to fully grasp and implement its vision.

Briola addresses this need by situating *Laudato Si'* within a broader theological and ecclesial discourse, drawing on the rich traditions of Catholic thought and the innovative insights of Bernard Lonergan and his theory of history. His work underscores the importance of a eucharistic and doxological approach to integral ecology, proposing that a genuine ecological conversion must be rooted in the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church. By weaving together theological, ecological, and social concerns through a eucharistic framework, Briola offers a nuanced and comprehensive interpretation of *Laudato Si'*, significantly contributing to contemporary theological scholarship and providing practical insights for the Church's mission in the modern world.

In Chapter one, Briola delves into the foundational work laid by Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI on the Church's ecological teachings, setting the stage by highlighting the numerous citations of these two popes in *Laudato Si'*, illustrating their significant influence on Pope Francis's encyclical. Here we see showcased how both John Paul II and Benedict XVI addressed the ecological crisis through the lens of 'human ecology,' a term intended to capture the interconnectedness of social and environmental issues. However, Briola points out that this concept sometimes undermines the comprehensive approach it aims to promote by inadvertently suggesting a competitive relationship between human and natural ecologies. John Paul II is credited with offering the first sustained papal attempt to address the ecological crisis, leveraging his global influence to highlight its interconnected nature. His teachings often emphasized the doxological and eucharistic character of creation, suggesting that all creation participates in God's worship. Despite these insights, Briola argues that John Paul II did not fully integrate these themes into a cohesive ecological framework. For example, while John Paul II briefly mentions the ecological significance of the Eucharist in his 2003 encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, he does not develop this connection in his broader social teachings.

Similarly, Benedict XVI continued to build on the idea of human ecology, emphasizing the need for a relational understanding of creation. He introduced the concept of the

'grammar of creation,' which underscores the inherent order and purpose within creation as a reflection of divine wisdom. Yet, like his predecessor, Benedict XVI did not fully integrate his eucharistic reflections into his ecological teachings. For instance, while his apostolic exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* highlights the transformative power of the Eucharist, this vision is not consistently applied to his environmental writings. Briola concludes that the potential of a doxological, eucharistic turn in addressing the ecological crisis remains unrealized in both pontificates. By failing to integrate eucharistic praise into their ecological frameworks consistently, both popes left a significant lacuna that *Laudato Si'* seeks to fill. This sets the stage for understanding how Pope Francis builds upon and extends these earlier teachings to present a more fully integrated approach to ecology.

In Chapter two, we see how Pope Francis synthesizes the insights of John Paul II and Benedict XVI to present a comprehensive and integrated approach to the ecological crisis. The term 'integral ecology' is central to *Laudato Si'*, encapsulating the interconnectedness of human and natural ecologies and emphasizing that environmental and social issues cannot be addressed in isolation. Briola explains that Pope Francis achieves this synthesis by grounding his ecological vision in a deeply doxological and eucharistic framework. Unlike his predecessors, Francis explicitly connects the celebration of the Eucharist with ecological action, suggesting that eucharistic worship can inspire and sustain efforts to care for our common home. This doxological approach is evident throughout *Laudato Si'*, where Francis frequently emphasizes the sacramental and liturgical dimensions of ecological care. For example, Francis's emphasis on the intrinsic value of all creation is rooted in a eucharistic worldview that sees the world as a sacrament of communion. This perspective challenges both biocentric and anthropocentric excesses by recognizing that all of creation participates in a cosmic hymn of praise to God. Thus, Pope Francis builds on the foundational work of John Paul II and Benedict XVI to present an integrated ecological vision that is both theologically robust and practically actionable. By rooting this vision in eucharistic worship, Francis provides a framework for addressing the ecological crisis that transcends the limitations of previous approaches and invites the Church to a more profound and comprehensive ecological conversion.

In Chapter three, Briola introduces Bernard Lonergan's theology of history as a framework for understanding the Church's mission in an ecological context. Despite Lonergan never directly addressing environmental questions, Briola posits that his pastoral agenda makes him an apt partner for articulating the eucharistic vision of *Laudato Si'*. Briola begins by discussing Lonergan's distinction between description and explanation. Description involves understanding things in relation to us, focusing on observable and practical aspects. On the other hand, explanation seeks to understand things in relation to each other, delving into their essence and interrelationships. This distinction is crucial for comprehending Lonergan's approach to theology, which aims to provide explanatory weight to the Church's mission.

Lonergan's theology of history, which seeks to integrate faith with the real historical world, science, technology, economics, politics, and culture, is outlined as a critical aspect of his thought. His concepts of emergent probability, progress, decline, and redemption provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the Church's

redemptive mission. Lonergan emphasizes that the Church's mission is not coercive but transformative, working through human freedom in a process he describes as the 'Law of the Cross.' This law entails a divine rejection of the will to dominate, instead advocating for a transformation through suffering and self-sacrifice. Here, Briola highlights how Lonergan's insights can be applied to *Laudato Si'*. By synthesizing the virtues of faith, hope, and love, Lonergan's theology provides a basis for understanding the Church's role in mediating religious conversion and addressing ecological concerns. Briola argues that this redemptive agency, grounded in the Church's eucharistic life, can overcome various forms of bias and determinism, fostering a new order of meaning and value in society.

In Chapter four, Briola further develops Lonergan's thought with the help of commentator Robert Doran, focusing on how the scale of values can capture the eucharistic mission of the Church. Lonergan's scale of values categorizes different levels of human values, from biological to transcendent, and provides a framework for understanding how the Eucharist integrates these values within an integral ecology.

The chapter begins by situating Lonergan's work within a Thomistic tradition, emphasizing his ambition to provide a comprehensive theoretical context for the Church's social teaching. Doran's work is introduced as a significant development of Lonergan's theology, particularly in articulating the social and cultural character of redemption. Doran extends Lonergan's insights by defining the role of social grace and the ecclesiological dimensions of the Church's mission, which includes the preferential option for the poor and cultural transformation. Briola explains how the Eucharist functions within this framework as a source of healing and creating in history. The Eucharist heals distortions within the scale of values by aligning human actions with higher, transcendent values. This alignment promotes a holistic approach to ecological and social issues, emphasizing all creation's interconnectedness and eucharistic worship's transformative power. Briola argues that by grounding ecological action in the Eucharist, the Church can offer a compelling witness to the integral ecology proposed by *Laudato Si'*. By integrating Lonergan's scale of values with the eucharistic framework of *Laudato Si'*, Briola provides a systematic account of how the Church's mission can address contemporary ecological and social challenges.

Chapter five integrates the insights from previous chapters to propose a comprehensive eucharistic vision for integral ecology. Briola brings together the theological framework developed in Part 2 with the practical and doxological concerns outlined in Part 1, aiming to present a coherent and actionable vision of the Church's mission in caring for our common home. Briola begins by emphasizing the explanatory depth that Bernard Lonergan's theology of history brings to the understanding of integral ecology. Lonergan's framework, particularly his scale of values, organizes the components of integral ecology, demonstrating how they interrelate and how the Eucharist functions within this system. This integration not only applies Lonergan's thought to interpret the concept of integral ecology but also expands it to meet the novel demands set forth by *Laudato Si'*. For example, Briola highlights how Lonergan's insights help elucidate the Church's preferential option for the earth alongside that of the poor.

Central to this chapter is the argument that eucharistic praise can catalyze the personal, cultural, and social transformations required by an integral ecology. Briola draws on the teachings of Popes John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis to illustrate how

eucharistic worship can address the multifaceted nature of decline in our common home. He posits that the Eucharist resolves the tensions in previous papal approaches by providing a higher, synthesizing context that unifies human and natural ecologies. Briola also explores the practical implications of grounding ecological action in eucharistic worship. He argues that the Eucharist not only inspires a culture of care but also concretizes this care in the Church's social mission. The sabbatical character of the Eucharist, for instance, heals relationships with God, others, and the world by fostering a serene attentiveness to creation and the rights of others. This eucharistic perspective counters the consumeristic and technocratic paradigms that dominate contemporary society, offering a transformative vision rooted in gratitude and sacrificial love. By embedding ecological concerns within the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church, Briola suggests that the Eucharist can serve as a primary source of Catholic identity and ecclesial belonging, thus ensuring the holistic and integrated approach envisioned by *Laudato Si'*.

Lucas Briola's *The Eucharistic Vision of Laudato Si'* stands out for its comprehensive integration of theological, ecological, and social concerns through a eucharistic lens. The book successfully bridges the gap between abstract theological concepts and practical applications, making a robust case for how eucharistic worship can inspire and sustain ecological care. Briola's rigorous engagement with Lonergan's theology adds significant depth to the discussion, offering a nuanced framework that enriches the understanding of integral ecology. However, the complexity of the theological insights presented may pose challenges for readers unfamiliar with Lonergan's work or advanced theological discourse. Despite this, the book's practical relevance shines through, providing valuable guidance for parish life and broader ecclesial engagement, ultimately making it an essential resource for those committed to implementing *Laudato Si'* in a meaningful and transformative way.

This book is highly recommended for theologians, clergy, and lay leaders seeking to deepen their understanding of *Laudato Si'* and its implications for the church's mission in today's world. By grounding ecological care in eucharistic worship, Briola provides a compelling vision that not only addresses the ecological crisis but also enriches the spiritual and communal life of the Church.