

## Christian Hope for Our Small Blue Planet

### Introduction

What hope can we have for the future of our Small Blue Planet? This is the great question of our time. Politicians, scientists, thinkers, presenters, writers, dramatists... all give what answers they can, and we must study the findings of prophetic persons to learn how to manage our resources more effectively. Such contributors vindicate the hope in GM Hopkins' line, *'There lives the dearest freshness, deep-down things'*. Many, thank God, are donating their lives not just to conservation but to a reclaiming of the good and beautiful things we are losing. Their message is one of hope for our Small Blue Planet within a historical perspective.

Theologians also must make their contribution and offer a divine message of hope. They must dare to speak of God's intention for the world. The following interwoven reflections explore the reasons for hope drawn from the divine order of things. *'Without vision the people perish'* (Proverbs 29:18): the Christian tradition is the treasury of God's vision, and it can strengthen us and liberate our energies to protect our Common Home.

### Where are WE?

But let's be honest! For a silent moment ask yourself: What is my vision for our small blue planet—my operative vision?...

Earth is some 4.6 billion years old. Astronomers predict it may last perhaps for another 4 billion years. So, it is now middle-aged, and is currently undergoing a mid-life crisis--which we humans have caused! As the Sixth Mass Extinction of Species becomes daily more real, climate grief and despair haunt many people. Some people speak of **'the funeral of the universe'**. We have not reached that point but the daily news-bulletins on the health of the planet make sober reading: while science is making spectacular

advances, global collaboration is still weak in following through because of vested interests in preserving the *status quo*, and time is not on our side.

Where are we in this unfolding scenario? Are we a little like the disciples at the Last Supper, eating, drinking and arguing, perhaps with a vague sense that all is not well but only dimly aware of what's around the corner?

Or as in Pope Francis' favorite parable, are we the Good Samaritan, moved by compassion for the 'half-dead' traveler—which is now Creation--and engaging all our energies and resources in restoring the stricken traveler to fullness of life?

### An Image

I sometimes imagine all the earth's species gathered at a party around the Table of Creation, enjoying the glorious mystery of each other's existence. Suddenly our fellowship is shattered as a greedy hand swoops down and begins to destroy one species after another. See the fear and dismay of a small bird, or a humble snail, or a wild animal, or a rare flower, as it whispers to you, 'Can we depend on you to defend us?' Then I see the Spirit looking at me, waiting for my affirmative response.

This is what eco-conversion is about...

### Whence Our Hope?

The Great Interventions of God (Latin *Magnalia Dei*) are the firm ground of 'the hope that is in us' (1Pt 3:15). Christian hope is realistic: it is our best gift to an anxious world. It is not wishful thinking or naive optimism: it is from God and focused on God, and is founded on the historical interventions of God in human history, as celebrated in the Hebrew Scriptures and encapsulated in the Exodus from Egypt. Our hope is divine energy which can sustain us even in the most unpromising situations.

Think of the Flood, the mythic representation of God's effort to cleanse the Earth of wrongdoing and sin: here we have the first and unparalleled Mass Extinction of Species! But God saves the day and the planet: he has Noah build the Ark and get living things on board, two of every species. Then God shuts the Ark safely in from the outside (Gen 7:16), and the rest is pre-history! Should Noah be our patron saint of Ecology?

Christian Hope has an indestructible quality that carries us beyond failure, frustration and dead ends. It is not to be used as a crutch to justify passivity but as an inspiration to do all we can to protect our planet, in the belief that God wants to guide our decision-making so that we may do what is wisest and most caring for the Planet. To repeat: Christian hope is our great gift to an anxious world.

### Time Scales

To avoid confusion, we need to clarify time-issues when we speak of the future of our Planet, because 'the future' covers different time-periods.

**1.A decade:** This is the immediate future perspective. We have only this decade to reduce global warming dramatically.

**2.This century:** We are already 21 years into a century of ecological turmoil and suffering—being borne especially by the poorer peoples of the earth. The disasters outlined in *The Uninhabitable Earth* will play themselves out until and if global warming is brought under control.... In this century we must repair as far as possible what we have damaged; year on year we will be forced into a much simpler life-style. The 'good old days' of unlimited progress and resources will not return.

**3.The Long-range Future:** If we don't reach our targets for 50% reductions in emissions, the planet will steadily become less and less habitable over the long run. Some species may survive the heat for a long while, but not *homo sapiens*--or should we say, *Homo*

*insanus*? We humans can bear only a small temperature rise: try a real Indian summer! Is there anywhere to escape to? No. There is no Planet B. We will go extinct, and what is left of Nature will breathe a sigh of relief at our passing.

Imagine a point in the future in which an older planet says to planet Earth: 'You'll get over it. I had this problem myself. Those humans could never keep their house in order!'

**4.The Finale:** But even if in the distant future Earth becomes uninhabitable, God's closing words in *The Hound of Heaven* by Francis Thompson can still give us comfort:

'All which thy child's mistake  
Fancies as lost, I have stored for thee at home.  
Rise, clasp My hand and come!'

In the Christian perspective the eschatological dimension (Greek *eschata* = end-things) runs parallel to our intra-worldly concerns. Salvation history is not simply linear, reaching its fulfilment only as time runs out. Rather it is here already, but not fully: there is the tension between the already and the not yet. Jesus asserts in Jn 6: '*Those who believe... have eternal life (v. 47) ... Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day (v. 54).*' The goals of salvation history are already being achieved: we are already in this time becoming '*the sons and daughters of God*' (Jn 1:12): this extraordinary leap forward by which we become sharers of the divine nature (as in the Offertory prayer) is intended to occur within the single lifespan of each one of us, so that by the hour of our death we are made over fully to God.



*Keukenhof in The Netherlands*

Putting this another way, the eschatological community of God is already gathering, and has been from our beginning. We can call it 'the Communion of saints'. We can call it the Cosmic Gathering, which increases year on year. Some 55m people die annually: and together with the untold number who have gone before them, they are with God, the 'God of the living, for to God all people are alive' (Lk 20:38; 1Cor 15:22). They are not in some mummified existence: 'The glory of God is the human person fully alive' as Irenaeus said in the second century CE, and that fullness of life is ours when--through death--we enter wholly into the divine dimension.

So, the 'eschatological community' is already being populated while human history runs its course. I hope this is reasonably clear. Human history as we know it in this world is not heading to a glorious Omega-point. The world is finite, and has a limited time-span. Sadly, with our connivance it is running down more quickly than it might otherwise have done. But God's enterprise is not lost: if we imagine a wheel of which the rim is human history, the spokes are the point in time when individual people step off the rim and are escorted to the 'Hub' where God is and where the Cosmic Party is already underway!

### **Grounds for Hope for Our Small Blue Planet**

I offer *six points* for your reflection, which I hope may be pastorally helpful. You can identify more!

#### **Firstly: The Spirit is Hard at Work!**

The world is bathed in divine love: it has been so from the very beginning when the Spirit of love hovered over the deep, and it will be so when time as we know it comes to an end. Pope Francis expresses this fundamental truth when he writes: 'When everything is said and done, we are infinitely loved' (*Joy of the Gospel*, 2013, n.6). We are the focus of the love that grounds all reality. This love is always close and active: the three divine Persons are always intensely engaged in our

welfare. So a first reason for hope for our future is the Spirit-led change of heart being shown in the current 'ecological conversion' of so many persons. '*The Holy Ghost over the bent / World broods with warm breast and with ah! Bright wings*' (G M Hopkins). Across the globe people of every nation are growing in awareness **that** Earth, so beautiful and fragile, is in crisis. Greta Thunberg has played a significant role in heightening this awareness among the young and the not-so-young; Pope Francis is alerting the world to care for Nature as generously as it is trying to care for us; US President Joe Biden accepts climate change as a primary challenge for his administration. The body of humankind, fractured by innumerable divisions, is beginning to coalesce around a common concern for our small blue planet. As a species among the other species on earth, we are becoming better in our relationships with one another through collaborating for our Common Home—this is already a great step forward in the healing of the planet.

The Spirit who presided at Creation is still hard at work! God has not despaired of Creation but has plans for it and for ourselves. '*I know the plans I have in mind for you, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope*' (Jeremiah 29:11). We can trust that God is totally committed to helping us now as we labour to protect our Common Home. Of all peoples, then, Christians have the least right to indulge in despair, because '*God, whose power is at work in us, is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine*' (Ephesians 3:20), and God promises to '*make all things new*' (Revelation 21:5). That we cannot imagine *how* this may be done should not lessen our trust that it *can be done*, by 'the Love who moves the sun and the other stars' (Dante: *Divine Comedy*, 33).

#### **Secondly: The Divine Command to us is 'Go!'**

Christian hope for the future of Earth is grounded in the goodness, power and wisdom of our creating and redeeming God as

revealed in the history of salvation, which includes of course the salvation of Creation! But God does not like to work alone! From the beginning God seeks out human collaboration. The simple divine command, **'Go!'** rings out across the scriptures when things are at their lowest, and when that command is obeyed divine power swings into action; the impossible happens and disaster is averted.

### *Examples*

- God says to **Abram**: *'Go from your country and your kindred to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation'* (Gen 12:1-2). When Sarah laughs at the idea that in her old age she would have a son to beget a great nation, the response is, *'Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?'* (Gen 18:14). And behold, Abraham becomes 'father in faith' of all believers.
- Moses is told: *'Go and assemble the tribes of Israel and say to them: I have given heed to you and to what has been done to you in Egypt. I declare that I will bring you up out of the misery of Egypt to a land flowing with milk and honey'* (Exodus 3:16-17). When Moses justifiably protests his unsuitability-- *'Who am I to go to Pharaoh?'*--God clarifies where the needed power lies: *'Who gives speech to mortals? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go, and I will teach you what you are to speak'* (4:13).
- Yet again, Jeremiah and Isaiah are both missioned through the divine command: **'Go'** (Isaiah 6:9; Jeremiah 2:2). And so repeatedly.
- In *Laudato Si* Pope Francis challenges all of us to make our own the crucified Christ's challenge to St Francis of Assisi in 1205: *'Francis, Go and repair my house which, as you see, is falling into disrepair'*.
- The Samaritan in Jesus' parable abandoned his own plans when he saw what had happened on the Jericho Road. He risked his life by stopping—perhaps the robbers were awaiting their next victim? To save the life of the wounded traveler he drew on all his resources; he gave his time and energy, his

wine and oil; he tore up some of his cloth, and improvised bandages for the wounds; he put the man on his own mount and himself walked beside it until he found the inn. He stayed the night, then paid the costs incurred there. As he departed, rather than washing his hands of the man, he kept him in his heart and returned to ensure that he was recovering enough to find his own way home. That unnamed Samaritan exemplifies what it means to be a member of God's workforce in the saving of the Wounded Traveler which is our Planet! The divine command rings out: **'Go and do likewise!'** (Lk 10:37).

The divine command addressed to us is, **'Go!'** With this tiny word God directs human history. Now it is our turn to listen for God's order to 'Go!' Our task is to be discerning communities, led by the Spirit, ready to 'Go' when God commands; we are to stay close to God, and to trust desperately. Such hope unlocks the door of divine possibility, and releases the energy and creativity required for our task.

If you ponder the unfolding story of our small blue planet since its beginning, you notice that each successive creative moment was unpredictable before it happened: it was orchestrated by the Author of reality who seems to enjoy the thrill of rescuing us from the cliff-edge. *'My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. I am about to do a new thing'*. (Isaiah 43:19; 55:8). Now that we are in the Anthropocene age with all its ambiguity, we have an active role to play in the emerging of the next phase of the Planet's story. Our choices, when in tune with God's designs, will protect and restore life; otherwise they will bring disaster. We are called to discernment on a planetary level, leading to Spirit-filled action. The assurance of divine presence gives us no grounds for smug passivity but rather should inspire us to **'Go!'**—to engage fully in our assigned tasks, even at great cost.

### **Thirdly: Our God is The God of Small Things**

The next reason for Christian hope for the future of the Planet is this: while God is almighty and great, God is also the God of small things. We live small lives, and our efforts to protect our world may seem humble and futile— such as conserving water when washing our teeth, avoiding plastic, saving foxes, growing herbs in a window-box. But small though these gestures are, they are rich in God’s sight. Many gospel episodes reveal that Jesus has a keen eye for the value of small people and small things. He speaks approvingly of the tiny mustard seed, of the widow and her mite; he multiplies a mere five loaves and two fish for 5,000 people (Mark 4:31; 12:41-44; 8:1-9). He promises that the gift of ‘a cup of water will not lose its reward’ (Mk 9:41). He remarks that although five sparrows are sold for two pennies ‘not one of them is forgotten in God’s sight, and adds: ‘even the hairs of your head are all counted’ (Luke 12:7). At Cana dull water is turned into the best of wine (John 2:1-12); at the Last Supper the simplest forms of human nourishment, bread and wine, receive divine and eternal meaning as they make present to the world, across time and space, the person of the Lord (Luke 22: 19-20).

Little children are the privileged ones to whom the kingdom of God belongs (Mark 10:14). Women, who had a lowly role in Jewish society, are the first to be entrusted with the news of Jesus’ resurrection. Jesus is drawn to the ‘nobodies’—to those without social standing or who were excluded from the community: lepers, tax collectors, the possessed, the cavalcade of cripples. Try listing those he met with, conversed with, healed, and notice how deeply he is attracted to the small people of the world whose only claim on his attention was their need.

Reading the Gospels from this vantage point grounds confident hope that even our tiny efforts to care for the neediness of our sick Planet carry a hidden value in the divine perspective. Our good deeds, no matter if they are as small as mustard seeds, blossom and go

with us into eternal life. ‘*Their good deeds go with them*’ (Rev 14:13). As St Paul says: ‘*Let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time*’ (Gal 6:9). ‘*Unless the grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone: but if it dies it bears abundant fruit*’ (John 12:24).

#### **The Story of *The Hazel Nut***

Julian of Norwich’s image of the hazel nut expresses well our hope for what is small: ‘*God showed me a little thing, the size of a hazel nut, lying in the palm of my hand. I looked upon it and thought, “What may this be?” And I was answered, “It is all that is made.” I marvelled how it might last, for I thought it might suddenly have fallen to nothing for smallness. And I was answered, “It lasts, and ever shall, for God loves it. And so, have all things their beginning by the love of God”. In this little thing I saw three truths: the first is that God made it; the second that God loves it; and the third that God keeps it safe.*’

Elsewhere she is told: ‘You will see for yourself: every kind of thing shall be well. The blessed Trinity will make all things well that are not well’ (*Showings*, ch 32). When we contemplate Nature and the night sky we marvel at what God makes of the specks of stardust in which we began. Since God ‘*does not faint or grow weary*’ (Isaiah 40:28) we are given hope that the same divine creativity will ultimately make all things to be well.

Already we can see the immediate fruits of our little efforts for Creation: on the local level beauty is being restored even while devastation occurs elsewhere. These short-term gains are invaluable: they make for cleaner, greener, more beautiful surroundings, and these helps to transform us. Again, those who care for the Earth are themselves becoming better people--more altruistic, with simpler life-styles and a clearer sense of the beauty of things. They live by wonder and awe: they stumble on the truth that *Laudato Si* affirms: ‘There is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dew-drop, in a poor person’s face.’ (233). They become minor mystics!

#### **Fourthly: The Divine is Present Within Creation**

Over the last century we have come to know our planetary history for the first time. We know that we were present--in an embryonic way—from the first emergence of the universe, 13.7 billion years ago. So were all the living species that are celebrated in the first chapter of Genesis. We have a common story: we began together, though we emerged into Earth's history at widely differing times.

Christian theology sees this but infinitely more: hope for our Planet ultimately lies in the fact that Creation includes a divine component which is not subject to corruption.

I mean that Jesus too was present in an embryonic way in the emergence of the Cosmos; our family tree includes him as our brother. His Incarnation is rooted in the inmost fibers of Mother Earth, so that it is with him that we and all other species share a Common Home; we have the same address! He has pitched his tent among us; his genealogy is forever intertwined with ours. He and we and all

creation are interconnected forever. Theology speaks of Deep Incarnation to underline that Jesus was not just a heavenly visitor on a limited visa. *Laudato Si* affirms:

*'He wishes to reach our intimate depths. He comes to us not from above but from within, that we might find him in this world of ours'* (236).

The world, as the song has it, needs 'the Good News in the present tense!' That Good News is in fact a Divine Person, embedded now and forever in our history.

Scientists tell us that Jesus breathed the same molecules that we now breathe. He saw the

wonders of Nature as we do, and loved them in all their beauty and variety--seeds, flowers, fruits, birds, fish, trees, mountains, lakes, and harvests. *Laudato Si* tells us that the destiny of all Creation is bound up with the mystery of Christ who holds the creatures of this world to himself and is directing them towards fullness as their goal: they are already imbued with his radiant presence (96-100). When we speak of his *deep* Incarnation and *deep* Resurrection we mean that these divine actions extend to all

matter and ground our hope that in the long run, all Creation will be safely brought home. We are then not struggling alone in trying to protect what we love: we are working in companionship with the Creator. And Nature



*Dawn of a new creation  
(from Facebook page of Loving Sister Earth)*

itself is on our side: we are not adrift, fighting a hopeless cause in cosmic isolation but rather immersed within a sea of creative energy. The boundless wisdom and dynamics within Nature are a primary resource. Nature, after all, has quite a head-start on us in repairing disasters, having already surmounted the massive challenges of five earlier mass extinctions of species!

Better than us, Nature knows what is needed to restore Earth's vitality.

#### ***A New Creation***

The first Easter already proclaims the dawn of a new creation, which moves forward when a person takes Christ seriously: *'So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new'* (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:17). Note here the stress on *'everything'*. Everything is made new because of our human solidarity with Jesus. Jesus is the first fruits and the rest of humankind is incorporated into him, *'in a bond so tight it*

*can never be broken*’, as the Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation puts it (see 1 Corinthians 15:20-23).

We must allow our tired minds and imaginations to be caught by wonder and gratitude for all of this: it gives us new energy to face the daily struggle for the environment. For the Christian the resurrection of Jesus is the ultimate motivator for our hope. N T Wright explains it well:

*With Easter, God’s new creation is launched upon a surprised world, pointing ahead to the rebirth of the entire creation. Every act of love, every work of true creativity—doing justice, making peace, healing families, is an earthly event in a long history of things that implement Jesus’s own resurrection and anticipate the final new creation and act as signposts of hope (Surprised by Hope, 294-295).*

We must abandon our small images of the divine. Our hope lies in the real God who leads from the front and is busy drawing all safely home. Jesus emphasizes the divine drawing when he says: *‘No one — and no thing — can come to me without the drawing of the Father’* (John 6:44, 55). It is because God is orchestrating all the dynamics of Creation that it can achieve its intended glorious destination.

### **Fifthly: God Makes the Barren Fruitful**

Christian hope for the planet is underpinned by the fact that the divine covenant with creation is not time-limited but endures forever: *‘When the rainbow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my everlasting covenant with every living creature on the earth’* (Genesis 9:16). Sightings of rainbows are a hope-filled surprise. And as we have already said, the bible closes with the promise of nothing less than a new heaven and a new earth. *‘The one on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new”’* (Revelation 21:1, 5). Note the *present* tense here: we are being told that our sorely wounded world is *already*

being transformed; newness is not awaiting the end of history: the New Creation is already underway! *‘Blessed are the eyes that see it!’* (Matthew 13:16).

Each living thing carries the signature of the Spirit, and *‘the wind blows where it chooses’* (John 3:8). *‘When you send forth your Spirit, you renew the face of the earth’* (Psalm 104:30). Today’s earth is ravaged by strip-mining, exhausted earth, dumping and all sorts of pollution. But this is precisely where God intervenes: *‘The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly’* (Is 35:1-2).

In the unique historical moment of grace and challenge in which we live, we are daily discovering that what had seemed lost and beyond recovery can come back to life again. Threatened species are being rescued from extinction. The greening of deserts is underway; a great wall of trees is being planted across the Sahara.

We are rightly shocked by the barrenness created by dust-bowls, strip-mining, waste-dumping, droughts and fires, great floating plastic islands, the death of coral reefs: but barrenness is the workplace of God.

### ***Fruitfulness***

Earth itself was barren, *‘a formless void’* until transformed by God’s creative act (Gen 1:1); then God breathes on inert clay and the human species emerges with the Garden of Eden to live in. But things go wrong early on: the barrenness of the earth is ascribed to human infidelity: *‘Cursed is the ground because of you’* (Gn 4:17). The Flood would have returned Earth to barrenness but for the divinely-inspired building of the Ark.



Salvation history moves forward by such life-giving interventions of divine power. It is as if God enjoys the challenge of barrenness! It reveals our total dependence on God for the continuance of life, and also the kindness of God in rescuing us from impossible situations. Thus barrenness is transformed into fruitfulness in the womb of Sarah--mother of Isaac, from whom the Chosen People come-- also for Rebecca, Rachel, Hannah and Elizabeth; Mary of Nazareth conceives her child by divine intervention. In Jesus' ministry the dead are raised, the sick are healed, water is turned into wine, bread and wine become the carriers of divine life; and most significantly, from the barrenness of death, on Calvary, the Hill of the Skull, comes eternal life for all.

The divine plan for Creation remains steady, and with God *'all things are possible'* (Mark 10:27 and elsewhere). This includes *'the universal restoration that God announced long ago through his prophets'* (Acts 3:21). In Genesis, God utters a word and the world is made; with a divine word the universe can be restored. Our God is a saving and restoring God, who has compassion on all things. God's creative love *'does not end'* (1 Corinthians 13:8).

God's interventions bring fruitfulness which transforms the most hopeless of human catastrophes. The Holy Spirit, Lord and Giver of Life, encompasses us. All divine interventions are creative: we are then justified in the hope that the ultimate future of Creation will be no less creative, surprising and life-giving.

#### *The Eucharist*

We can share the limitless hope of Bishop Desmond Tutu who reminds us that 'only God knows what's next!' But already the Eucharist gives us a broad hint of 'what is next', and helps us daily to renew our hope in the future of Creation. In the Eucharist the divinization of the cosmos is already ongoing in a hidden way (*Laudato Si* 236). The crumb of bread and the drop of wine used for consecration are connected to all the other elements of Creation, and just as the Incarnation of God touches all material

reality, so too the Resurrection embraces every particle of the cosmos. This is why theology speaks of Jesus' *deep Incarnation* and *deep Resurrection*, to hint at the pervasiveness of divinity in our world. We may legitimately add in *'deep Glorification'*. *'The Eucharist is an act of cosmic love; through it the whole cosmos gives thanks to God. Even when celebrated on the humble altar of a country church, the Eucharist is always in some way celebrated on the altar of the world'* (236).

Hopkins' phrase, 'The world is *charged* with the grandeur of God' points up the great mystery: divinity is the dynamic that is pulsating unseen through the particles and the electro-magnetic fields that constitute our world. Thus, the final and definitive shaping of the cosmos is already in hand.

More than a half-century ago Vatican Two expressed this hope-filled message for humankind:

*'We do not know the moment of the consummation of the earth and of humankind, nor the way the universe will be transformed. The form of this world is passing away and God is preparing a new dwelling and a new earth whose happiness will surpass all the desires for peace which arise in human hearts. Then death will have been conquered, the daughters and sons of God will be raised in Christ, the works of charity will remain and all of creation will be set free. Here on earth the kingdom is mysteriously present: when the Lord comes it will enter into its perfection (The Church in the Modern World, 39).]*

#### **Sixthly: The Cosmic In-Gathering is Underway**

*'Gather up the fragments lest any be lost'* (John 6:12). This was Jesus' command to the disciples after the feeding of the 5,000 in the desert, and they filled twelve baskets with the crumbs that lay around! We can relate this image to the Creation Story. We are dismayed about the future of Earth, which will eventually become a lifeless planet due to the heat generated by our exploding sun. But its



finiteness can free us to think ‘outside the box’ about future divine planning for creation. Can we allow ourselves to believe that while the glory of Creation, including ourselves, cannot be achieved intra-historically, it is already taking final form in the extra-historical or divine dimension? This brings us back to our earlier exploration of the interplay between world history and eschatological reality. The relentless tragedy of human death is already being transformed into joy in person after person: through the Resurrection those who have gone before us are experiencing the fullness of eternal life. Christian belief is that all that is dead is already being raised into the life of God: St Paul speaks of Jesus as the first-fruits of the resurrection, and asserts that the full harvest is already being gathered in. *‘What is sown is perishable, but what is raised is imperishable’* (see 1 Corinthians 15: 20-58). But what in fact is being raised? Surely, we don’t rise as ghosts, disembodied? instead, like the risen Lord in the resurrection accounts, we become fully alive both in spirit and in transformed matter? Our glory and the glory of Creation merge. All the good we did on Earth *‘will follow us into eternal life’* (Revelation 14:13), and we will rise as our full selves, in our inimitability and uniqueness, with our particular styles, affections, relationships, emotions, thoughts, memories and experiences. These ‘fragments’ as they seem, are what make us unique images of God, and surely all that is love-tinged of them will accompany us into eternal life. *‘Love does not come to an end’* (1Cor 13:9).

### ***Without blemish***

What is not good will be cleansed and healed by the creative action of God: our *‘spots and wrinkles’* will be smoothed out *‘so that we may be holy and without blemish’* (Ephesians 5:27). God’s Project is the salvation of all humankind (Jn 12:32) and of all Creation (Rm 8:21), an audacious goal indeed and worthy of God. The plan of salvation is totally comprehensive: *everyone* and *everything* is within the divine consciousness: all being, every person, every sin, every death, every

tiny prayer and act of love. God, who is sheer joy, as St Thomas Aquinas says, takes everything seriously. Jesus’ task, for instance, is to *‘take away the sin of the world’* (Jn 1:29). Through his Resurrection ‘a universe cast down is renewed, and in his rising the life of all has risen’ (Easter Prefaces). *‘Nothing, then, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord’* (Rom 8:1; 38-39). To quote CS Lewis: ‘Joy is the serious business of heaven’. May we not hope that those who have died have already undergone whatever remedial education in loving was needed, and that they are now endlessly deepening their love of one another, exploring joyfully the details of the weave of divine providence that has brought them together, and delighting in the generosity of the Author of eternal joy? Heavenly joy will not be a private or exclusive affair but communal and all-embracing, because we are all interconnected in the Risen Christ.

### ***Come and Have Breakfast!***

In the delightful post-Resurrection scene portrayed in John 21, after orchestrating the great catch of 153 fish, Jesus playfully tells his disciples, *‘Bring what you have caught’*. Then they hear what I feel is the most endearing phrase in scripture: *‘Come and have breakfast!’* (John 21:9-12). We have so much to bring to the feast—every small detail of our crowded lives, the jottings of our secret scriptures. No fragment of our lives is lost: our labours with their hopes and catastrophes; our hidden fears and tears, our silent endurance and acceptance of the pain of life, our dreams and hopes; all are presented and lovingly acknowledged by God. The deaths of those we loved and of species that took millions of years to reach their present form, the passing of the natural beauty of this world, the demise of our Common Home--all such losses must rightly grieve us, but what is lost will be restored to us, bathed in glory--and we can include our pets too! We, who are children of this earth and sustained by our relationships with one another and with Creation, will know *‘the riches of the glory of*

*this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory*’ (Colossians 1:27).

In one of his most moving poems, *The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo*, Hopkins reminds us that every hair of our heads is numbered, and says that

*...not a hair is, not an eyelash, not the least lash lost. The thing we freely forfeit is kept with fonder a care than we could have kept it*’.

### ***The Divine Storehouse of Memory***

In the memory of God everything is eternally present. It is a storehouse, immensely rich with everything, great and small, that is good, loving and worthwhile in human experience and in creation. C S Lewis suggests that our enriched memory may have a central role in eternal joy, empowering us to re-create and share what we now think of as past and lost. All love and beauty, all the joys of life, will be refreshed and made new: the fields of our childhood--long ago built on--will be there in the fullness of their reality to enchant us. The theological ground for this is the fact that to God everything is present, and once our time boundaries melt away, what was past will be present again. In this perspective, everything worthwhile, beautiful and meaningful to us, everything that constitutes the richness of human life, is being transferred to the divine order of things even as our lives go by, and awaits our communal enjoyment; human history, Creation and we ourselves will glow with transfigured meaning.

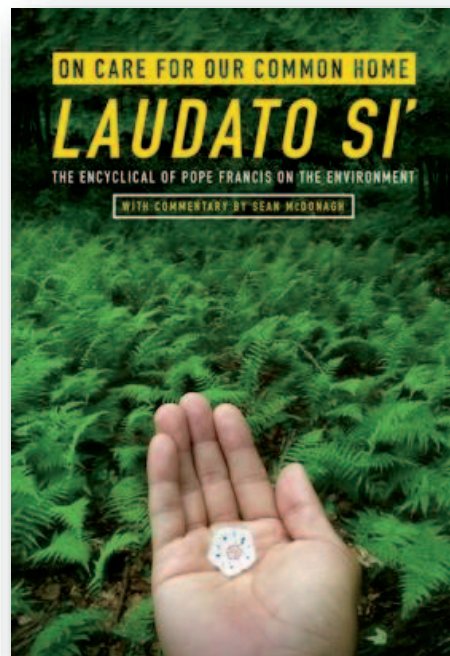
### ***Escaping from Plato’s Cave***

The allegory of the Cave was Plato’s attempt to convey the drama and tragedy of human existence. The prisoners in the dark cave can see only the fleeting shadows of things. We can feel like them: living in the shadow of the Paschal Mystery we find ourselves in the foreboding of Holy Thursday, in the agony of Good Friday, in the dark emptiness of Holy Saturday. But in Plato’s myth one prisoner escapes from the cave: he suddenly sees everything in its richness of colour, form and harmony. He goes back to tell the others, but the good news is too much for them.

St John Henry Newman must have pondered this myth, because to describe the meaning of death he had on his gravestone: ‘From shadows and images into the Truth’. For us, Easter Sunday is dawning: the tomb is empty; the Lord has risen, his Resurrection is transforming everything. All too rarely as of now do we catch glimpses of the glory of Easter Day, but the culminating episode in the endlessly amazing story of our small blue planet lies here, in ‘*the restoration of all things*’ (Acts 3:21). Then the Lord will survey all Creation, pronounce it ‘*very good*’ (Genesis 1:31) and say to us, ‘*Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*’ (Matthew 25:34).

‘The ultimate destiny of the universe is in the fullness of God’ (LS 83). Such is our hope for our small blue planet!

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