

A Clear Inversion of the End Times Schema

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By way of a prologue: reorienting iconography¹

“Unfortunately, Neo Rauch didn’t give me permission to reproduce his painting: ‘Der heilige Franziskus Bergoglio Märtyrer erhält die Hommage an Gaia,’ and yet his ‘The Martyr St Francis Bergoglio receiving the Homage of Gaia’ would have been a wonderful way to introduce my contribution. Rauch, in his inimitable style, has picked up on the ancient tradition of paintings of martyrs (there is even a dried up palm tree in the left-hand corner, a direct allusion to the traditional theme and a definite reference to a Caravaggio painting. But the painter is very keen on the enigmatic and the emblematic and has found a way to completely reverse the meaning. So while in the ancient paintings of the Christian tradition you can see the sky opening at the top of the canvas, with a power of clouds descending, flashing lightning and swirling angels and cherubs—the reward of eternal salvation; but nothing of the sort with this new version of the martyrdom. The central person in the throes of agony seems to be orienting himself towards the bottom of the canvas and he seems to be hoping for salvation from a dark, violent, violet and reddish, form.

No doubt about it, this is certainly a portrait of the current Pope Jorge Mario Bergoglio! It is surprising the painter had the audacity to canonise Pope Francis before his death, but he makes it clear why on the top right hand side of the canvas, where one can make out a mixed crowd with ‘Santo Subito!’ on placards. No doubt about it, Rauch’s iconography gets its inspiration from the Little Poor Man, just as the latter’s inspirations came from Christ. One can even find, in the centre of the painting, luminous and dainty colours in the Fra Angelico tradition, though it is hard to figure out if this is in homage or in mockery. In any case, Bergoglio’s face is perfectly recognisable, even if his vestments look more like Franciscan homespun than white cassock and pallium.

¹A version of this chapter was written on the occasion of a lecture delivered to the Institut Catholique de Paris, the Common Good Chair, Friday the 6th April 2018, at the invitation of Father Frédéric Louzeau whom I would like to thank along with the group of colleagues he has brought together at the Bernardins for the last three years in order to explore the links between theology and ecology. This translation by Stephen Muecke.

As always with Rauch's work, interpretation is complicated by the proliferations of levels, anecdotes and citations. What is certain is that this particular Francis is in great pain and that both his hands are pointing towards the bottom of the painting without us knowing if he wants to go there or get away. Everything is set up as if light and salvation—but how can one be sure if it is really about light and salvation?—came from below, and it is towards this below that the saint is heading, unless he is pushed by the crowd of figures that he seems surrounded by, and whom one has trouble making out if they are friend or foe.

The mystery clears up somewhat when one reads the card and finds out that it is about a martyr. But wait, St Francis—the one from Assisi, the model for Bergoglio—was not martyred at all, and if he finished his life fasting and praying, it was in his own bed dying a natural death! Why this strange idea of making a martyr out of Bergoglio, as he flees downwards, to a place which in all Christian iconography usually represents the darkness of Hell?

The answer can be found by working out what is going on in the crowd behind St Francis. Some of the people are clutching at the Saint's garment as if forcing him to stand up and go back; trying to put him back in the normal position for someone who is waiting to receive the martyr's palm from on high. The peoples' faces, and some are wearing mitres, others helmets, indicate, as far as we can tell, a state of fury or indignation. But could it be that the viewer is projecting an interpretation onto the painting, as a function of the numerous disputes that we know Bergoglio stirred up in the heart of the church? What clinches my diagnosis is that Rauch has sketched a sort of pale phantom who looks like—no doubt about it—Ratzinger the Pope emeritus. Rauch is playing with the image of the Pope and the anti-Pope, but without us being able to tell clearly the good from the bad...Here the painter is again in his usual pattern, having fun of piling up ambiguities.

And yet that section of the crowd that seems to be moving clearly towards the bottom right (what certain philosophers call 'the terrestrial'), sends a clearer message. What we notice here are excited young people coming straight out of an illustration from times past of the 'children's crusade'—Rauch loves borrowing clichés from fairy stories of a middle-ages flavour. All are clutching or pulling on Francis' habit. They are assisted by rows of 'natives' in Indian costumes, with feathers and tattoos, and also, as far as one can tell, by nuns in black and white, carrying large red crosses, who seem to be praying at the top of their voices, or urging the martyr Pope to head towards the shadowy mouth opening like an abyss under their feet.

What makes the painting indiscernible, and what explains why, when we saw it in Rauch's studio and we couldn't decide on the message—and it probably also explains the embargo imposed on it to this very day—, is that Bergoglio's face is exactly poised between mystical enthusiasm and horror! As if Rauch has melded the ecstasy of St Theresa with the dread of one of the damned seeing the maw of the Devil in Hell opening in front of him. So it is indeed a last judgement, or at least the judgement of Pope Francis, but without us knowing if he is saved or condemned.

The enigma would be cleared up if one could reconcile the title with the dark red spot which is supposed to represent whatever it is that the Pope is heading towards, and that Rauch labels as 'Gaia'. Even approaching the freshly painted canvas, one can't discover any figure that might relate to the mythology. Nothing in any case that would justify the title of an homage to Pope Francis rendered by Gaia. It is this monumental uncertainty that explains the unspeakable suffering emanating from the face of the martyr and indeed from the whole painting. In any case, there is no doubt that it is one of his masterpieces, and the first, to our knowledge, to open a new chapter in Christian iconography. What a pity it remains hidden from the public!"

The painting by Rauch will never exist since I invented it, but Ali Gharib had made a fairly good approximation of what I had in mind. I thank him a lot for it.



Laudato Si' is not about ecology

To respond to the theme of this painting, I would simply like to begin with *Laudato si'* and reflect on the originality of the idea, as anthropological as it is theological, that Pope Francis puts forward in his encyclical. I'd like to read this text in order to show how it brings about a clear inversion of the end times scenario. And I don't think the consequences of this inversion have been drawn out enough (or their impact on iconography made visible in Rauch's work). To take up the question of what the Anthropocene does to the theology of Creation, it goes without saying that I have no particular qualifications relating to the two elements that I want to link, except perhaps having followed the literature on the Anthropocene fairly closely.

It would be tempting to place the encyclical within the ecological movement, as if Pope Francis had 'become aware', in a way more emphatically than his predecessors, of the importance of the existential crisis, and that he wanted to add to the list of things at stake that are worthwhile preaching about. Now, saying that it is an ecological text would, in my opinion, take away its charm, and at the same time remove the opportunity to open up new fields for theology. If, in this case, it is not a matter of ecology, it is because it concerns a change in the very notion of world and hence of nature. It is the idea of the *terrestrial* that has become indefinitely modified, along with changes to the coordinates of both time and space. It is this idea I want to highlight.

The originality of *Laudato si'* is based on the invention of a trope that expresses 'the cry or the clamour' (translations differ) coming from the earth and the poor:

...a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. (LS 49, emphasis in the text)

This double cry or clamour is a quite powerful signal that the *figure* in question has scarcely any resemblance to that of 'nature' which is at the heart of traditional ecological preoccupations, as it is with equally traditional theology (I'll come back to the notion of *figure* later). The Earth, as far as I know, in the context of the old climatic regime, doesn't have the capacity to cry, and no-one would have dared begin a text describing it with the beautiful expression, borrowed from St Francis, of 'earth sister mother':

Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who

sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with coloured flowers and herbs. (LS 1)

Which is then followed by the Pope's commentary:

This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her ... This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she 'groans in travail' (Rom 8:22; LS 2).

If this new figure of an Earth that groans under the actions of humans is so original, it is because it is blended into the encyclical in an inalienable way with the cry of the poor. Now, two hundred years after the birth of what we could call a preoccupation with ecology, and despite all the efforts of activists and thinkers, the link between the misery of the poor and the ecological catastrophe or mutation still remains rather weak. Social and ecological issues have taken divergent paths, and are even seen as contradictory, as if one had to choose between the economy and the ecology. We saw this choice this year during the demonstrations, where the slogan decoupled the two: 'the end of the world and the end of the month', a neat summing-up. In *Laudato si'* there was the opposite; the indissoluble link between two new objects, the cry of the earth and the poor, became the very object of a new apostolic attention.

So, it is clear that we are in no way dealing with a text about which one could say: 'Hello, here's a Pope finally getting interested in the question of nature.' No, it is actually a prophetic innovation through which a Pope brings to the fore a new figure that shifts the former idea of nature, shared until now by ecologists as well as by their enemies, in order to create a new object for the attention of Christians: the mother sister clamourer of the earth and the poor. Here then is the originality that one should focus on, without immediately rushing to turn it into something traditional and inoffensive. If one compares this encyclical with the texts of his predecessor, Benedict XVI, that have ecological content, the difference is stark: the argumentative style of the second clashes with the wave of prophetic images in the first.

The cry of the Earth and the poor

When one is dealing with radical innovation in the forms that predication² takes, one cannot be content to offer doctrinal commentary which would have the effect of inserting the novelty into tradition without renewing that tradition.

² An act of proclaiming or preaching; a sermon—*trans.*

This is what would happen if *Laudato si'* were considered a text relating to a 'nature' that has to be respected or saved. This is why one has to insist on the link between the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor before weighing up the originality in any detail.

This is basically what the controversial term, Anthropocene, is saying: that the Earth is capable of crying, albeit in a manner that is colder, less activist but no less engaged.³ While the transformations effectuated by humans during the Holocene (over the last 12,000 years) have been enormous, they were carried out on the environment, not on the Earth system itself. The engagement of the Earth system in human history—geohistory—defines in a more scientific way what the encyclical is calling a 'cry' or a 'clamour'—let's call it a groan that can be studied and measured.

Michel Serres, in a pioneering text, brought to light the idea of 'the earth is moved'⁴ in opposition to the famous expression attributed to Galileo, 'and yet the earth does move.' That should be enough to shake up the best established certitudes. We have to live with the recognition that all our efforts at predication, all the rituals, all the ecclesiastical institutions, all the metaphors with cosmic meanings, have been developed during the Holocene. They have never had to confront, literally not figuratively, a moved and clamouring Earth. The term 'Anthropocene' is a mnemonic technique to help all those who encounter indifference and denial. They can mumble into their beards and take shelter from any new inquisitions: 'and yet she is moved.' So we could say that the encyclical is the most flagrant example of what the Anthropocene does to Creation theologies.

Now, *Laudato si'* is also innovative because of its direct attack on the greatest limitation of this friendless hybrid term that anthropology and geology cobbled together far too quickly. What the criticisms of the Anthropocene concept get right (though I prefer to call it the 'New Climatic Regime'⁵ to give it its legal and institutional dimensions) is that the humanoid agent, the *anthropos* of the Anthropocene, remains an abstract being, a generic human, an empty universal.

³ For a recent scientific synthesis, see J. Zalasiewicz et al., *The Anthropocene as a Geological Unit*, Cambridge: CUP, 2019, and for an excellent summary for the general public, N. Davidson, 'Human activity has transformed the Earth – but scientists are divided about whether this is really a turning point in geological history,' *The Guardian*, 30th May 2019.

⁴ Michel Serres, *The Natural Contract*, Trans. E. MacArthur and W. Paulson, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995, p. 86.

⁵ Latour, Bruno, trans. C. Porter. *Facing Gaia. Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime*. London: Polity, 2017

Everyone has agreed that it would be completely unjust not to take into account the unequal distribution of both responsibilities and impacts. Roughly speaking, the least responsible are the most affected. Consequently, Pope Francis, by associating the cry of the poor with the cry of the Earth, is not content to follow the Anthropocenic fashion. He diverts the concept by attaching it to the long history of the Church being on the side of the poor. *Laudato si'*'s innovation is to pick up on a major geohistorical innovation—it really is the Earth system that groans and is moved—and link it to the apostolic preoccupation that is as old as Christianity.

We can understand why this encyclical is so radical and that it has its own way of taking up the rehashed idea of the 'common good': it isn't the same common—the Earth is involved now—and nor is it the same good, and *above all not the same bad*. No surprise that everything possible was done to bury as quickly as possible such a radically prophetic speech. That's what the imaginary Rauch painting was trying to show.

Where, now, are the things which are above?

Let us try now to draw out the consequences of such a novelty in predication. I mean for predication, and not just for theology or for philosophy. Indeed, one cannot speak properly on religious topics if one doesn't judge them in the light of predication. Their degree of truth or falsehood depends on their capacity to convert those to whom one is presenting them. For example, how does one understand the Epistle to the Colossians read during the last Sunday in Easter: 'If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.' (3, 1-2)?

I know perfectly well that philosophy and theology will find a thousand ways to explain these dated expressions, by putting them back in their context, just as exegesis will know just how to explain the formula 'sitteth on the right hand', as well as the trope 'things which are above'—and these disciplines will all be right. But it remains the case that these will be scholarly distractions from one enormous fact: the radical textual contrast is actually this, just as today's ears hear it: 'Set your affection on things above, *not on things on the earth*.' In terms of the reception of the speech, one cannot be clearer on the order and nature of the preferences, on the direction of the gaze imposed by its metaphors, on the priority accorded to one or another virtue—reiterated for today's ears that have become totally ignorant of the ways of preaching the Christian tradition.

So the question is one of knowing how to reconcile this figure with that of paying attention exclusively to the Earth and its poor, groaning together from the

same injustices. It is obviously not enough to then say: ‘Set your affection on things on the earth, not at all on things above.’ It would be too simple to make do with an inversion of the spatial arrangement: ‘If you come to lose the Earth, what is the use of saving your soul?’⁶

And yet, if we have actually moved from an old to a New Climatic Regime, we cannot keep serving up the same metaphors from the same old wineskins, happy to finesse the meanings attributable to phrases like ‘things which are above’ or ‘below’. Such an epochal change, or change of era, brings everything else with it. One can deny that in this encyclical there is an inversion in the overall structure of all predications; one that is sensitive to the common cry, partially articulated, of the Earth and the poor suffering with the same groans. As in Rauch’s painting, Pope Francis’ finger is indicating something new that is situated, well and truly in the metaphoric order, ‘below’, and not ‘on high’. In any case, there is no doubt it is designating a new horizon. Here there is a complete change of direction, of vector, in time as well as in space.

The situation we are now in, in sum, is one that is marked one way or another by the impression that we are moving *downwards*, after a long period where we seemed to be distancing ourselves from any limit and actually flying through the air. Landing becomes a verb that defines an epoch. It seems that we are terrestrialising ourselves in a new way; we are reaching towards a new attractor. The old idea of the Earth conceived of as a globe, the old idea of matter, no longer have any relation to the Earth on which we have to live. Hence, in my opinion, the importance of Earth system sciences, the important innovation that is Gaia, and the term ‘Critical Zones’ that do not designate nature, but the thin skin of the terrestrial globe on which is spread all that has lived and all that will ever live.⁷ It is in no way a matter of opposing the cold and objective sciences to the subjective world, but one of choosing among the sciences those which allow us to understand afresh the surprising difficulty of living in these critical zones that react so quickly to our actions. The Earth that we are beginning to discover thanks to the sciences no longer resembles at all that heavy materialist one that ‘spiritualists’ loved to hate.

⁶ B. Latour, ‘Si tu viens à perdre la Terre, à quoi te sert de sauver ton âme?’, in J.-N. Pères, ed. *L’avenir de la Terre: un défi pour les Églises*, DDB, Paris, 2010, p. 51-72. Translation by Translated by Leslie Murray and Randall Auxier:
https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/e2a905_e1952f8d48ab4925828387b05e5c77d6.pdf

⁷ S. L. Brantley, et al., ‘Designing a network of critical zone observatories to explore the living skin of the terrestrial Earth,’ *Earth Surface Dynamics*, 5.4 2017, p. 841.

Schema and figure

As always, when one has the task of exercising a certain degree of discernment when it comes to ecclesiastical innovation and tradition, it helps to go back to the distinction between what can be called a *schema*, and what I earlier called a *figure*. In itself, a schema is silent. It says literally nothing without the figures; only they can modulate it, express it, incarnate it and decline it in a thousand ways depending on how the predication is situated. But these figures themselves can say nothing without being attached to the schema that they are provisionally expressing, and always more or less awkwardly, given they have no power to translate it directly. One cannot put one's trust in any of these figures in order to discern which new figure can expand on the precedent in the right way, without *going back through the schema*, for only it can permit one to judge its fidelity in and through the renewal of expression. Without this return to the schema, there is no discernment possible between regurgitation and repetition. This was Charles Péguy's most important lesson, *par excellence*.⁸

What is really powerful about the *Laudato si'* text is the way it makes the schema perceptible once again behind the traditional figures. This is because it directly and explicitly picks up on the theme of the present apocalypse in all the questions that relate to the ecological crisis (or more precisely the New Climatic Regime). Here I am not thinking of the accusations that those who are indifferent or sceptical throw at ecologists who are accused of 'giving in to apocalyptic thinking', but very simply of the return to the end times question as it relates to all moral, social and political questions, and above all—this is very surprising—to all the scientific subjects. Once again, this theme becomes contemporaneous with history, or rather with geohistory, in an even more powerful way, more demanding than at the time of the threat of atomic holocaust (a threat which coincides exactly with what the stratigraphers are calling the short-dated Anthropocene, in 1945, and which, by the way, remains suspended over our heads like at the height of the cold war).

The return of eschatology is a complete surprise for those with an ecological sensibility, whether activist or scientific, because they refuse, for the most part, to be interested in whatever manner to any story or consideration that appears to them to be 'religious'. Even those who are appreciative that Pope Francis is interested 'finally, in their subject', are indignant about those passages in which he uses tradition again. The common sense among my ecological friends, whether

⁸ C. Riquier, *Philosophie de Péguy ou les mémoires d'un imbécile*, PUF, Paris, 2017.

they are historians, philosophers, sociologists or geochemists, is that one should be able to advance on all these fronts without going back over all this 'old Christian stuff'. And among this old stuff, nothing horrifies them more than eschatology.

Hence the superiority of the end of times schema. It cuts through the whole business, whatever the beliefs or non-beliefs of all and sundry. I know of no practitioner on these questions who does not have his or her own eschatological version of the current situation. In this way it renews all positions: finally, 'the end of the world' becomes once again the name for the new question of the Common Good, or more exactly, it seems that our common good is quite precisely the end of the world. The new universality is not having a world.⁹ This is a return to objective, material, calculable, dateable questions of ending in all the senses of the word end, and I also mean *finality*, *definitive judgement*, as well as goals pursued.

While it may be contradictory to attempt to directly designate the schema expressed by the figures of tradition, it is precisely in times of crisis that one can best perceive it for a moment behind the transience of figures. To sum it up, one could say, 'as time passes, a time irrupts that is not passing.' And of course its corollary: this is an impossibility, since time continues to pass. In consequence, to understand such an irruption, one has *always to begin again* in expressing it via more and more figures, the truth as much as the necessity to begin again afresh in order to literally follow, accompany time that passes, adapt oneself to the logic of time that passes, correct each time the same paradoxical message that is always necessarily badly understood.

This schema can only be grasped, historically, by contrast with the civic or cosmic religions that are attached to a quite different phenomenon: how can one manage to endure, how can one maintain one's existence, how can one discipline or tame passing time? What religions have always been attached to is the durability, one would say now the 'sustainability' of their societies, or their civilisations. Until other religions emerged—incidentally, Jan Assmann deliberately calls them counter-religions¹⁰—that are attached to working another

⁹Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).

¹⁰Jan Assmann, Trans. R. Savage, *The Price of Monotheism*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

schema, that of accomplishment, or the judgment of time, in and despite of passing time. Hence the new religions are relatively disinterested in civic and cosmic continuity, but are insistent on end figures or on the accomplishment of time. In their eyes, it is not a matter of assuring durability, but rather rupture, beginning with liberation, from all questions of continuity: ‘The times are accomplished’. Here we notice one of the origins of these ‘things above’, that carry the contrast with the ‘things of the earth’ that St Paul spoke of. It is clearly not about a relationship between low and high in an actual spatial sense, but between that which lasts indefinitely and that which passes; between what is judged and what judges.

The New Climatic Regime, to the extent that it fits the schema, obviously overturns the figures that have been able to express it up until now. If there are secrets that henceforth everyone is looking a little desperately to find, then they involve managing to endure, to obtain a continuity, a sustainability of societies against the threat of time ending, not just hoped for, but unfortunately well and truly happening by dint of the very actions of those humans previously ‘liberated’ from the cosmic and civic constraints of tradition. The old ‘things above’ have become ‘above ground’: indifference to the crisis, denial of the climatic situation, indolence and escapism.

The end times have irrupted in an astounding and completely unpredictable way. They are not the accomplishment of a promise that has finally appeared from on high, not the constantly renewed expectation of a truth that could only appear by betraying itself; but as the realisation (unfortunately factual, objective and temporal) of a reality for which humans—some more than others—are solely responsible. Not for one second have we the right to forget that end times are a reality for a large number of species. It would be particularly undignified to want to replay the scene where St Francis is preaching to the birds, holding out to our feathered friends of today the promises of apocalyptic Revelation, while all these species are in the process of disappearing for good, victims of the sixth extinction for which we have become the enablers!

It should be clear that the distribution of values all through the schema is well and truly inverted. Probably, long ago in St Paul’s day, the ‘vertical’ dimension, shall we say, of the end of time was marked positively, and the ‘horizontal’ one (staying within the clichés of the Sunday sermon) had a negative value. The hierarchy of attachments was such that it was preferable to attach oneself to realities on high rather than terrestrial realities. But today the end of time does not represent the liberation from cosmic constraints, nor emancipation from all

civic prohibitions either, but, on the contrary, a fleeing above ground and the obstinate refusal to hear the clamour of the earth and the poor, humans and non-humans, deprived of all protection and any durable identities. A general engendering crisis.

To put it bluntly, it is *transcendence that has become a falsehood*, if not diabolical, and it is *immanence* (that same immanence that was despised through centuries of ‘spirituality’) that is becoming desirable, moral and civil. Now the horizontal takes precedence over ‘the vertical dimension.’ What was obviously not taken into account when the figures of high and low were invented and then validated by tradition, was that the end times could be the result of the emancipatory action of humans themselves, a ‘apocalypse of civilisation’ as Eric Voegelin says,¹¹ and nothing to do with the glorious return of the Son of God. This is what obviously changes everything. This explains why, in the painting that I dreamt I could get Rauch to paint, Pope Francis’ finger points not to the heavens but to the Earth, the old and quite new Earth of the incarnation that lies without any help in the groans of a continuous, and more and more painful, childbirth.

New figures of immanence and imminence

I would like to draw three lessons from this upturning of the values attributed to the figures of the end times schema, a schema that obviously remains the same since no-one has stopped scrutinising its power and its contradictions with ever new figures, without ever being able to confront it directly and without ever effacing its contradictory character.

The first lesson concerns the revision of traditional positions concerning infamous paganism, which people continue to battle against to maintain the no less infamous ‘vertical dimension.’ If there was ever a tragically mistaken target in the history of counter-religions, it would certainly be that of seeing paganism as being a figure in competition with them over the truth (Assmann saw this very clearly). Rather, it was more a matter of paganism being a set of cultural practices that had quite different values in mind, values that suddenly become of major importance under the New Climatic Regime.

‘Paganisms’ have innumerable forms, virtues, weaknesses, even crimes, but effectively aim for immanence, but not in the sense that would be given by the pretension to transcendence. Immanence, for paganisms, means continuity, prolongation, survival of cosmic and civil forms that are backed up by divinities

¹¹ Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics: An Introductory Essay*, (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1952).

that the world has always known, without any pretence (contrary to the accusation of idolatry), divinities that are obviously crafted by human hands—and thank goodness.¹² On this point, the hatred of idols has blinded rather than enlightened the matter.

If one begins to look at these paganisms with some envy—after they have almost all been cruelly eradicated, and continue to be so by many missionaries—it is because there is again a desperate search for just this kind of immanence. Whatever one says about the immense virtues learnt from the counter-religions, whether they take missionary or Christian forms (or secularised, laicised, modern ones), the least one can say is that they have not highlighted the key question concerning their survival, their durability, their temporal continuity! They rushed into the climatic crisis without a moment's reflection. They were happily indifferent to their terrestrial condition, and above all—and this is the worst part—they believed they had found their greatest virtue in this indifference...

Obviously, one is not advocating a return to pagan cults—they have been destroyed and totally eviscerated in any case—but to stop fighting them, to understand the genre in order to begin to learn from them how to survive in the process of detoxifying the counter-religions somewhat.¹³ The fear of paganism has slowed down and often paralysed attention to the terrestrial. When one is asked, 'Will the Earth-Mother demand human sacrifices?' one should always respond without hesitation that millions of men and women have been, and are being, sacrificed to the forgetting of immanence and in the name of an atrocious above ground transcendence. These are the sacrifices that might be stopped first.

The second lesson, tied as it happens to the first, concerns the restitution of the question of rituals to a key position in any revision of predication. In fact, and I am well-aware of it, the schema does not express itself particularly well in the language of argumentation—saying 'the end of time in passing time,' is stating nothing—but finds prime expression in ritual (and even better, and this is self-evident, in the good life and through practices of charity without which we would be only be 'loud-tongued bells'). To speak of the Common Good without speaking of rituals that construct those commons, is to talk to the wind. Where are the rituals, ceremonies, prayers, hymns that have made good use of *Laudato si'* in order to make the evangelical predication comprehensible, not for those on the

¹² Bruno Latour. *On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods*. (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

¹³ É. Hache, ed., *Reclaim. Recueil de textes écoféministes, 'Sorcières'*, Cambourakis, Paris, 2016.

inside, *ad intra*, but for those, *ad extra*, who have become total stranger to it?—I mean of course the greater part of our fellow citizens, since understanding nothing that has to do with Christian predication has become the default position today.¹⁴

Now it is here that one runs up against the set of metaphors, hymns, gestures, invocations and prayers that continue to depend on a classical contrast between realities up above and those of the Earth, without taking into account their recent inversion. How could one fail to be struck, during the last celebration of Good Friday, that the prayer that is supposed to be ‘universal’ did a run-down of all topics except the most universal of all, that of the earth mother sister who is groaning under our blows? If a ritual has to be invented, it would surely be that one: a problem of composition, each time different, and which in addition has to confront the sciences of this Earth reconfigured as it is under the Anthropocene. If one wanted to simplify what one is aiming for in the reinvention of rituals, one could say that it is a matter of a fresh recombination of *figures of immanence and figures of imminence*, the ancestral sanctity of the world plus the new urgency not to make it disappear. These should allow, in particular, to finally identify enemies, in an explicit but not vengeful way, among the innumerable current conflicts, and ones yet to come, in the occupation of lands and in the wars over climate.¹⁵

The third and final lesson is one of knowing how to seize the occasion of a renewal of the very conditions of predication, an occasion offered by the New Climatic regime and the inversion proposed in *Laudato si'*. The end times schema has long had a powerful effect of liberation and emancipation, as opposed to the civil and cosmic religions. One should bear in mind that, with the beginning of the modern era, because of the ill-fated competition with the sciences, it was literally ‘lost in the clouds’. In any case, it was left without the strength to fight the false above ground transcendence and the indifference that was increasingly noticeable and increasingly criminal, towards terrestrial existence. Against this above ground temptation, the call for ‘things above’ started to strike the wrong note, or even seems like it was absolving the crimes committed (I recall that climate scepticism or what I call climate quietism is still very common among

¹⁴ Cardinal Tukson noted: ‘In this sense, the social ethicists and the sacramentalists can shed light on the way the idea of time as *kairos*, as opposed to time as simply *kronos* (that leads us to ‘rapidification’), can motivate a real change in the modes of life, production, commerce, consumption and waste.’

¹⁵ Harald Welzer, trans. P. Camiller. *Climate Wars: Why People Will Be Killed in the Twenty-First Century*. (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2012).

Christians and *de rigueur* in the United States for those of a supposedly evangelical confession.

Until the present situation of the inversion of the values of transcendence and immanence...Now, suddenly, predications inspired by the end times schema are reinvested with all their power, but on condition of grasping *immanence* as incarnation and *imminence* as a battle against the above ground. It is no longer a matter of waiting, or of preaching the Apocalypse, but one of *stopping the end of time*, in the completely practical, worldly, objective and material form of the ground disappearing from under the feet of humans and their companions. This takes us back to the major question of the *katekon*, of the capacity to slow down, to suspend, to retard the end times which are no longer in front of us like something hoped for, but, in an unexpected way, *behind us*, like jumping into the abyss. Besides, is it not to this power of slowing down that we are invited by the children who have been striking on Fridays to halt the catastrophe that will deprive them of any future? Halt the end of time, plunge into the realities down here, immerse oneself rather than emancipate oneself, learn to depend: this is the movement and the re-found energy of apostolic predication. The schema is still the same, but how will it be different? But its figures are all new.

Return to the beginning

It is on this return of energy, guided this time, towards these new figures of incarnation, that we can gauge the prophetic character of *Laudato si'*. It would be a mistake to try to force the New Climatic Regime into the usual doctrinal and ritual apparatus, thinking that it is just a matter of tweaking 'nature' a little, just recoloured a bit, a bit more emphatic, a touch more tragic. Rather, it seems to me that this new figure of the world at last offers the occasion to preach *ad extra*, and no longer *ad intra*, rendering the older schema of the end of time comprehensible, once more, for the multitudes. The originality of geohistory is one where a situation opens up that is not unlike the beginnings of Christianity.