The new encyclical “On Care of Our Common Home” bears the title taken from the first words of Saint Francis’s “Canticle of the Creatures, Laudato Si’, “Praised be You, my Lord, with all your creatures,” but the Canticle itself doesn’t appear until Part IV, some 80 numbered paragraphs later. That part of the letter is titled “The Message of Each Creature in the Harmony of Creation.” The theme of particularity is characteristic of Pope Francis. Particularity, diversity, multiplicity are major themes in his teaching. Not since Blessed John Duns Scotus, the Doctor Subtilis, has a major Catholic figure given such attention to the individuality, or what Scotus called the haecceitas, or “thisness” of creatures. For the great appeal of the Canticle is its particularity. Like Adam in the creation, the three young men in the fire, or the Psalmists, Saint Francis names each of the creatures through which he gives praise to God the Creator. The beauty of the poem, beyond its romantic invocation of
brother and sister creatures, lies its identification of each by name and function.

Praised be you, my Lord, through
Brother Wind,
and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather through whom you give sustenance to your creatures.

Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Water, who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.

Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Fire, through whom you light the night, and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.¹

Each creature has its own place in creation and praises God in its own way.

In *Evangelii Gaudium* and again in *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis appeals to Aquinas, *Pars Prima*, question 47, to justify this position. “Saint Thomas Aquinas wisely noted that multiplicity and variety ‘come from the intention of the first agent’ who willed that ‘what
was wanting to one in the representation of the divine goodness.””
might be supplied by another,” inasmuch as God’s goodness
“could not be represented fittingly by any one creature”. Hence we
need to grasp the variety of things in their multiple relationships.2
Accordingly to imagine the unity of creation, Pope Francis proposed
that we envisage the unity of creation not as a uniform sphere, but
rather as a polyhedron of interlocking parts, like the triangles of a
soccer ball, in which the distinctiveness of every part is
recognizable.3

It is a godlike vision in which each creature is loved for itself,
just as parents love each of their children separately without
comparison. He cites the Canadian bishops, “To sense each
creature singing the hymn of its existence is to live joyfully in
God’s love and hope”.4 Leonardo Boff explains how Saint Francis
literally sang with other creatures. “It would be selfish,” he wrote, “to
become deaf to the hymn that they themselves sing to the Creator. He
sings with them, the cricket and the lark. The sister larks praise their
Creator,’ remembered Saint Bonaventure in his Major Life of St.
Francis saying to the brothers, ‘Let us go among them and sing
ourselves to the Lord, reciting his praises and the canonical hours.””5.
Drawing on a prayerful exercise in memory of the sort retreat directors often propose, Pope Francis asks us to evoke memories that will elicit our ties to the earth:

The history of our friendship with God is always linked to particular places which take on an intensely personal meaning; we all remember places, and revisiting those memories does us much good. Anyone who has grown up in the hills or used to sit by the spring to drink, or played outdoors in the neighborhood square; going back to these places is a chance to recover something of their true selves.

Academic study, including the abstractions of philosophy and theology, can rob us of that sense of particularity, but a religious appreciation of things requires that awareness of particularity. C.S. Lewis once remarked that to read literature appreciatively we need to maintain an attachment to particular detail, like a child who corrects a parent who retells a favorite story without mentioning a beloved incident or fact. Pope Francis would agree.

Saint Bonaventure, the pope tells us, reminds us that creatures in their individuality lead us to God. He writes:
The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person’s face. The ideal is not only to pass from the exterior to the interior to discover the action of God in the soul, but also to discover God in all things. Saint Bonaventure teaches us that “contemplation deepens the more we feel the working of God’s grace within our hearts, and the better we learn to encounter God in creatures outside ourselves.”

I would be remiss not to mention that discovering God in all things is also a theme of Ignatian spirituality.

More broadly, Pope Francis is reminding us that true theology, as Baron von Hugel explained, includes not only doctrinal and institutional elements but a mystical component too, and retrieving for ourselves that mystical dimension is an integral element in a Christian theology of the environment.

Following Bonaventure, *Laudato Si’* goes as far as to propose “that each creature bears in itself a specifically Trinitarian structure, so real that it could be readily contemplated if only the
human gaze were not so partial, dark and fragile.”

Bonaventure also believed that Saint Francis’s joy in the harmony of nature constituted a reconciliation of humanity with nature that overcame the rupture of original sin. It was a return to primordial innocence. Pope Francis writes that this innocence was lost with humanity’s forgetfulness of our creaturehood, our loss of a sense of dependence on God and of our limitations as God’s creatures. “Saint Bonaventure held,” he writes, “that, through universal reconciliation with every creature, Saint Francis in some way returned to the state of original innocence.”

**A Dynamic Creation**

It is consistent with the theology of *Evangelii gaudium* to propose that the harmony of creation is not a static one, but a dynamic one in which the Holy Spirit is at work, as Ps. 104:30 has it, “renewing the face of the earth.” Keeping with the aesthetic metaphors of *Laudato Si’*, we might say the Spirit is introducing new chords to the divine symphony, adding to the diversity and multiplicity which gives glory to God.

In August of 1919 in studies on the Isle of Jersey, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, the French Jesuit scientist and spiritual
writer who reconciled Catholicism with evolutionary theory, composed a Hymn to Matter modeled on the Canticle of Creation. Matter in his sense is the bare stuff of creation and in its tension with humanity it is the occasion for our growth in consciousness and our sanctification. He wrote:

Blessed be you, impenetrable matter: you who, interposed between our minds and the world of essences, cause us to languish with the desire to pierce through the seamless veil of phenomena.

Blessed be you, mortal matter . . . .
Without you who batter us and then dress our wounds, you who resist us and yield to us, you who wreck and build, you shackle and liberate, the sap of our souls, the hand of God, the flesh of Christ: it is you, matter, that I bless.

And here is the main point:

I acclaim you as the divine milieu, charged with creative power, as the ocean stirred by the Spirit, as the clay molded and infused with life by the Incarnate Word.¹¹
Evolution, including what some call Anthropocene evolution, that is the evolution of which human beings are a part by virtue of their creativity and the transformation of matter is also the clay which the Spirit brings to life.

Finding God in all things entails not just finding God in the natural world but also finding divinity present and working in the human world on the interface of humans and nature. I think of a woman astronomer who contributed a piece to America on how, when she was being treated for cancer suddenly realized while on the treatment table that God was laboring for her, as Saint Ignatius would say, in the diagnostic equipment which located her diseased cells and the treatment technology which eliminated the cancer. “Technology has remedied countless evils which used to harm and limit human beings,” writes Pope Francis. “How can we not feel gratitude and appreciation for this progress, especially in the fields of medicine, engineering and communications? How could we not acknowledge the work of many scientists and engineers who have provided alternatives to make development sustainable?”\textsuperscript{12}

In drafting Laudato Si’, Pope Francis is necessarily concerned with correcting our technological hubris. He is no Luddite. He finds
beauty in a skyscraper or an airliner.¹³ “Valuable works of art and music now make use of new technologies,” he writes. Think of synthesizers and electronica. “So, in the beauty intended by the one who uses new technical instruments and in the contemplation of such beauty, a quantum leap occurs, resulting in a fulfilment which is uniquely human.”¹⁴ With Teilhard and citing the Jesuit paleontologist in the notes, Francis affirms that “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.”¹⁵ That is a clear reference to Teilhard’s Cosmic Christ, an eschatological vision that was adopted by the Second Vatican Council in Gaudium et Spes and later by both Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI who, at the time of the Council, were critics of what they thought was too positive a view of human history and human activity on the part of the Council fathers.¹⁶ In a line that summarizes the spirituality of Teilhard’s Divine Milieu, Francis writes, “Human beings, endowed with intelligence and love, and drawn by the fullness of Christ, are called to lead all creatures back to their Creator.”¹⁷
In the latest phases of human and creation history technology is intertwined with creation. But it is also technology that has greatly augmented “the silent rupture” in the harmony of creation, the harmony of humans with one another and with the natural world, and ultimately with God. That rupture is sin. “The harmony between the Creator, humanity and creation as a whole,” reads 
*Laudato Si*, “was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations.”\(^\text{18}\)

Even the partial restoration of the harmony of creation depends on finding a more holistic view of life. “Today,” Pope Francis says:

Analysis of environmental problems cannot be separated from the analysis of human, family, work-related and urban contexts, nor from how individuals relate to themselves, which leads in turn to how they relate to others and to the environment. There is an interrelation between ecosystems and between the various spheres of social interaction, demonstrating yet again that “the whole is greater than the part.”\(^\text{19}\)

Accordingly, “We are faced one complex crisis which is both social
and environmental,” concludes the pope, “Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature, not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach . . .”

20 Restoring the harmony of creation, so far as it is in our power, requires approximation of that harmony in our science, our policy and our lifestyles.

**Pope Francis Critiques the Technological Paradigm**

Francis, if you will, is a next-generation Teilhardian, because he recognizes the ambiguity of technology, its downside as well as its benefits. Indeed, when it comes to Catholic Social Teaching, he is an innovator in his recognition that technology has become an enormously aggravating factor in disrupting the relations between humanity and nature and in relations among human themselves. In particular, it is the nexus between technology and economics, or more precisely the too-little-regulated market, that is responsible for the depth of damage that humans have done to the planet.
Together they share in our collective concupiscence, since technology is always striving for greater control and the market is always looking to maximize profit. In combination technoscience and business magnify humanity’s sinfulness even more than our political collectivities, as Reinhold Niebuhr taught us, greatly enlarge our private egoism.

This process is greatly augmented by the globalization of the economy and the abstraction from nature and from human relations it involves, so different from the culture of encounter Pope Francis encourages and the attention to particularity that is part of prayerful life. The pope writes, “globalization has made it easy to accept the idea of infinite or unlimited growth, which proves so attractive to economists, financiers and experts in technology. It is based on the lie that there is an infinite supply of the earth’s goods, and this leads to the planet being squeezed dry beyond every limit.”

Francis does not reject technology or the market across the board. But he does denounce “every tyrannical and irresponsible domination of human beings over other creatures.” He has been mischaracterized as a Marxist and an opponent of capitalism. He is
neither of those things. Like his predecessors, he simply criticizes the negative effects of the unregulated market and the pernicious ideologies that underlie them. His critique is a social analysis of uncritical application of technology and the cultural penetration of “the technocratic paradigm.” It is carefully tuned and balanced critique. The critics of the economics of *Laudato Si’* have misconstrued and misrepresented a nuanced and very Catholic critique of the social and ecological impact of our technological economy.

If you have doubts, I recommend you read Chapter IV of *Laudato Si’*, nos. 137-162 and keep a checklist of the places he praises technology or economics, the places where he criticizes them, and the instances where he may seem to offer an outright condemnation. And compare his criticisms to the teaching of his predecessors. You will find, I think, his critique is consistent with that of John Paul II and Benedict XVI.

Pope Francis concludes his criticism of the technocratic paradigm this way:

Nobody is suggesting a return to the Stone Age, but we do need to slow down and look at reality in a different
way, to appropriate the positive and sustainable progress which has been made, but also to recover the values and the great goals swept away by our unrestrained delusions of grandeur.  

In Thomistic terms, he is asking us to limit the application of rationality (*ratio*), especially technocratic economic rationalism, with intelligence (*intellectus*), that is, a more aesthetic understanding which embodies felt awareness of the whole web of relations in which we live. A “kind of salvation” from rationalistic reductionism, Pope Francis contends, comes “in beauty and those who behold it.”

**Beauty as a Way to Salvation**

One of the less noted themes found in *Laudato Si’* is that of beauty and particularly the pedagogy of beauty as a remedy for the regnant technicism of our time. He writes, “By learning to see and appreciate beauty, we learn to reject self-interested pragmatism.”

Beauty also provides us with intimations of the divine and the life to come. In Eastern spirituality, he tells us, “Beauty is one of the best loved names” for the divine and for the transfigured or divinized human nature. That beauty, he writes, is our eschatological hope.
At the end, we will find ourselves face to face with the infinite beauty of God (cf. 1 Cor 13:12), and be able to read with admiration and happiness the mystery of the universe, which with us will share in unending plenitude.28

In the meantime, “we are called to make this a beautiful world, in the preservation of nature, of course, but also in the beautification of human habitat, especially for those most deprived of beauty, namely, the poor.” He writes, “More precious still is the service we offer to another kind of beauty: people’s quality of life, their adaptation to the environment, encounter and mutual assistance.”29

**God’s Grandeur**

I would like to conclude with a poem that captures a sense of the re-vivifying presence of God even in a world soiled and broken by human industry. The U.S. bishops used it in their 1991 pastoral letter “Renewing the Earth” to conclude their message with a spirit of hope and renewal. It is Gerard Manley Hopkins’s God’s Grandeur. He composed it at the height of Britain’s industrial revolution, but it is just as applicable today as thick smog, resulting from vehicular conjunction, once more envelops London.
The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil,
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wear man’d smudge and shares man’s smell; the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.
And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives a dearest freshness deep down things;
And through the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs –
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

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1 LS, no. 87.
2 LS, no. 86. In Evangelii gaudium, see no. XX.
3 EG, no. XX.
4 LS, no. 85.
5 Boff, 37.
6 LS, no. 233.
7 LS, no. 239.
8 LS, no. 66.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
12 LS, no. 102.
13 LS, no. 103.
14 Ibid.
15 LS, no. 83.
16 See LS, note 53; Sollicitudo rei socialis, no. XX, and Caritas in veritate, no. XX.
17 Ibid.
18 LS, no. 66.
19 LS, no 141.
20 LS, no. 139.
21 LS, no. 103.
22 LS, no.83.
23 LS, nos. 103-114.
24 LS, no. 114.
25 LS, no. 112.
26 LS, no. 223.
27 LS, no. 235.
28 LS, no. 243.
29 LS, no. 150.