

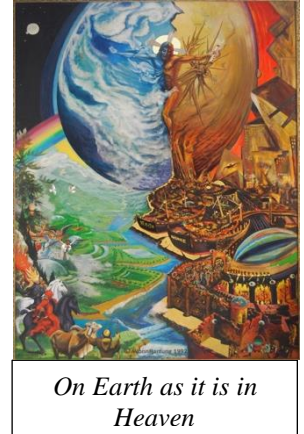
On Earth as it is In Heaven

Eileen Connor Callahan

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Erin Lothes Biviano, Ph.D.  
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## Introduction

It is increasingly evident that our world is in crisis. Our air, oceans, and ground have been exploited by industrialization. Simultaneously population growth has brought us to a critical tipping point, that moment beyond which an unstoppable event will take place.<sup>1</sup> Will we become morally responsible and come together as a world to rectify the complex problems of climate change, or will we experience the dire consequences that mean the destruction of the planet?<sup>2</sup> This question is illustrated in the painting, *On Earth as it is In Heaven: Through Him All Things Were Made*<sup>3</sup>. It depicts the choice that exists between care of our common home or degeneration into a chaotic world devoid of beauty or harmony between human beings and the rest of God's creation. *On Earth as it is In Heaven* illustrates many of the important moral issues facing society that are outlined in *Laudato Si'*<sup>4</sup>, the papal encyclical promulgated in 2015 by Pope Francis. In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis looks to the work of his predecessors for a history of increasing concern for the environment and also, inspired by Vatican II, looks to the signs of the time to loudly sound the alarm that these global problems must be addressed thoroughly and immediately on behalf of all of God's creation.<sup>5</sup>



## Sacred Art

The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines sacred art in the following way: “Sacred art is true and beautiful when its form corresponds to its particular vocation: evoking and glorifying, in faith and adoration, the transcendent mystery of God.”<sup>6</sup> Pope John Paul II wrote, “None can sense more deeply than you artists, ingenious creators of beauty that you are, something of the pathos with which God at the dawn of creation looked upon the work of his hands.”<sup>7</sup> Inspired by Pope John Paul II's Letter to Artists in 1999, Pope Francis released a video message for artists in August of 2017 that further defined the goal of sacred art:

The arts give expression to the beauty of the faith and proclaim the Gospel message of the grandeur of God's creation. When we admire a work of art or a marvel of nature, we discover how everything speaks to us of Him and of His love. That artists of our time, through their creativity, may help us discover the beauty of creation.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Merriam-Webster Dictionary. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tipping%20point> (accessed 11/18/2018).

<sup>2</sup> Tucker, Mary Evelyn. “Can Science and Religion Respond to Climate Change.” *Zygon* 50 (2013): 949.

<sup>3</sup> Vonn Hartung, A. (1992). *On Earth as it is in Heaven*. [painting] Puerto Rico.

<sup>4</sup> Francis, *Laudato Si'* (May 24, 2015), [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html) (hereafter cited as LS).

<sup>5</sup> *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World Gaudium et Spes*. paragraph 4, (accessed 11/25/2018).

[http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html).

<sup>6</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 2502, (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 660.

<sup>7</sup> *Letter of His Holiness John Paul II to Artists*. [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1999/documents/hf\\_jp-ii LET\\_23041999\\_artists.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1999/documents/hf_jp-ii LET_23041999_artists.html). (accessed 11/9/2018)

<sup>8</sup> *The Pope Video: Pope's Worldwide Faith Network*. <https://www.thepopevideo.org/for-artists/>. (accessed 11/9/2018).

In response to the Pope’s video, Vonn Hartung was asked to write an article for the website, CTS Catholic Compass. In the article he explained, “I seek God and strive to reveal Him in my art. In fact, it is my strongest act of prayer.” The painting, *On Earth as it is In Heaven*, is his prayer for the Earth. Vonn Hartung’s painting allows viewers to envision the future, both in a healthy environment and also in a world tormented by the consequences of over-consumption.

### The Artist

Arturo Vonn Hartung is a Puerto Rican artist who specializes in several forms of sacred art. Utilizing his Catholic faith and his skills as an artist, Vonn Hartung creates paintings, sculptures, and mosaic works. He said, "Art defines for me the gateway to a deeper reality." He added, "In a world that moves too fast it is my braking mechanism, the search-light of my direction, the balance point of my stability. In a world of detached science and ephemeral technology, it is my intimate link with my Creator."<sup>9</sup>

As a small boy growing up in Connecticut, Arthur “Arturo” Vonn Hartung loved the stained-glass windows of his church, St. Joseph’s in New London. Through his continuous exposure to the beauty of the windows, he began finding sacred beauty in all things. He said, “As I grew, I came to understand that God was everywhere, hidden in all things. I saw this most reflected in the magnificent beauty of nature, and as I matured in faith, I grew to know Him through Christ, in Humanity.”<sup>10</sup>

Vonn Hartung had travelled to Puerto Rico in 1961 at the age of 19 and fell in love with the island and briefly attended the art program at the University of Puerto Rico. He had limited success in finding work to sustain himself as a student and artist and soon returned to his family in Connecticut. He graduated with an art degree from the University of Hartford and continued painting while holding the dream of living and working in Puerto Rico. In his heart, he felt it was his calling to create sacred art for the churches of Puerto Rico. He met and married his wife, Patty, and together they moved to Puerto Rico in 1984 where he has been successful creating sacred art in several mediums including painting, sculpture, and ceramics.



Blessed  
Carlos Manuel

His work is highly respected worldwide and Vonn Hartung’s portrait of Blessed Carlos Manuel Rodriguez Santiago, Puerto Rico’s first person to be beatified by the Catholic Church, hangs in the North American Pontifical College at the Vatican. He created *On Earth as it is In Heaven* in 1992 and it received renewed interest in 2015 with the publishing of *Laudato Si*.

### The Painting

*On Earth as it is In Heaven: Through Him All Things Were Made*, is a 42 x 57” oil on wood panel painting created in 1992 when Vonn Hartung was a participant in the Justice and Peace Commission of COR (Conference of Religious of Puerto Rico). He became active in this organization due to deteriorating environmental conditions caused by overdevelopment and pollution in Puerto Rico. For Vonn Hartung, *Laudato*

<sup>9</sup> Ender Island Sacred Art Institute. <https://www.endersisland.com/vonn> (accessed 11/3/2018).

<sup>10</sup> Compass Faith in Art. <http://ctscatholiccompass.org/faith-in-art/> (accessed 11/9/2018).

*Si* provided theological clarification of what scientists report regarding climate change.<sup>11</sup> In response to *Laudato Si*, Vonn Hartung posted commentary online in December of 2015 to show how elements of his painting correspond to the encyclical. Vonn Hartung wrote, “The painting asks the question of the viewer, each one of us, whatever our religion or beliefs, which future do we want to live in, leave to our children and future generations?”<sup>12</sup>

Vonn Hartung said, “At the center of the painting we see ‘Our Common Home’, in a healthy, vibrant, livable state on one barren scorched state of death on the other. It is shaped like an egg to symbolize the fragility of Earth’s ecosystem as well as her abundance and fertility.” This image and the artist’s relate to this passage in *Laudato Si*, paragraph 205:



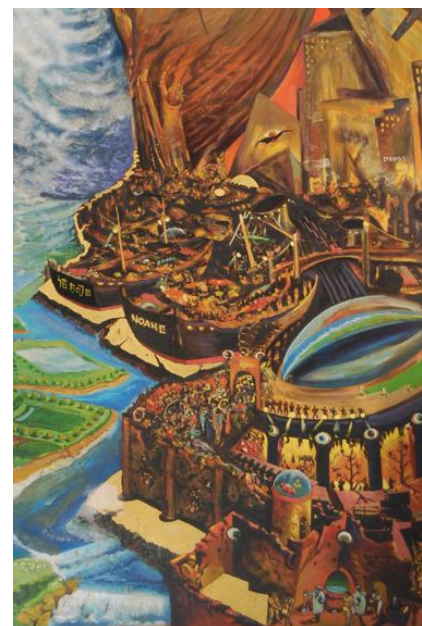
planet Earth, side, and in a egg to natural commentary

Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start, despite their mental and social conditioning.<sup>13</sup>

The focal point in this painting is the crucified Jesus, at the center, caught between two potential futures. It reflects the free will that we have to choose a healthy way of living and respecting the environment and all creation or the opposite. Inspired by the Earth Charter, Pope Francis stated in *Laudato Si*, paragraph 207,

As never before in history, common destiny beckons us to seek a new beginning... Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life.<sup>14</sup>

On the right side of the painting, we see a world in crisis. This relates to Pope Francis statement in paragraph 161, “Doomsday predictions can no longer be or distain. We may well be leaving to coming generations desolation and filth.” That can be seen in the painting and Vonn Hartung’s explanation of his use of symbolism:



met with irony debris, understood by if dripping from LIGHTNING to achieving a world’s natural the Wall of out in pain and of colors of buildings suggests that

- Gold is used in the lower portion of the painting as the broken egg, trickling down, or striking as if symbolize envy and greed in desiring and seemingly ultimate dominance and control of the resources and wealth which defines the fracture and Separation of the two possible futures.
- Behind this Wall of Separation which seems to cry protest, lays a collapsing world painted in a palette burnt siennas and umbers of burning and burnt out collapsing in upon themselves. This bio-sphere

<sup>11</sup> Arturo Vonn Hartung. <https://www.avonnhartung.com/2018/11/21/through-him-all-things-were-made-jn-13/> (accessed 11/21/2018).

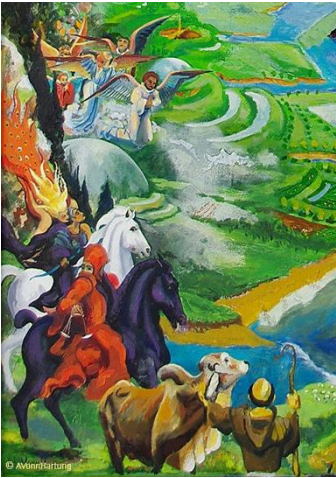
<sup>12</sup> *Catholic Compass Faith in Art*.

<sup>13</sup> LS 205

<sup>14</sup> LS 207

the only living space to be realized in such a depleted future might well be the heavily guarded privatized dwellings of the super wealthy.

- The seven deadly sins are implied, although partially veiled through the use of semi-abstraction indicating the complete loss of moral values and the ephemeral (ever changing) nature of modernity.<sup>15</sup>



On the left side of the painting, however, is a world view that is, for the most part, hopeful. It reflects Pope Francis' words near the end of the encyclical, "we come together to take charge of this home which has been entrusted to us, knowing that all the good which exists here will be taken up into the heavenly feast. In union with all creatures, we journey through this land seeking God".<sup>16</sup> In the foreground, the artist included Saint Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of nature lovers, environmentalists, and ecologists.<sup>17</sup> Vonn Hartung explained, "The landscape is serene and apparently sparsely populated, suggesting intelligently designed self-sufficient communities

where constant traffic on superhighways is unnecessary. It is a work in internal harmony!" He stated,

In the middle of this Hopeful Vision we can see a group of angels accompanying The Horsement of the Apocalypse, who as they advance are stopped by the Angel that (we imagine) whispers to them, Wait! Humanity still has time and the free Will to change its ways and do the will of God!<sup>18</sup>

The painting essentially asks people to decide what kind of world do we want to live in and leave for future generations. We have the scientific evidence fortified by faith to act responsibly. Vonn Hartung said, "Knowing as opposed to not knowing about any impending threat gives us a responsibility to help others to grow in awareness, because truly a great part of the challenge is to get people to face the reality of what we are up against."<sup>19</sup>

### Finding Hope

The encyclical preceded our current situation where hope is becoming harder to find. In 2017, the United States pulled out of the Paris Agreement, a United Nations lead convention of nations dedicated to limiting and mitigating climate change. Under the current administration, the United States has eliminated over 60 regulations that were implemented to protect the environment and endangered species.<sup>20</sup> The United States is home to 5% of the world's population but consumes 24% of the world's energy.<sup>21</sup> Weather across the globe is showing the effect of anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions which are causing more frequent and more

<sup>15</sup> Arturo Vonn Hartung. <https://www.avonnhartung.com/2015/12/05/on-earth-as-it-is-in-heaven/> (accessed 11/21/2018).

<sup>16</sup> LS 244

<sup>17</sup> Praying Nature with Saint Francis of Assisi. [http://www.praying-nature.com/site\\_pages.php?section=Guide+for+Nature+Lovers](http://www.praying-nature.com/site_pages.php?section=Guide+for+Nature+Lovers) (accessed 11/25/2018).

<sup>18</sup> Arturo Vonn Hartung. *On Earth as it is In Heaven*. <http://www.avonnhartung.com/> (accessed 11/9/2018).

<sup>19</sup> Email Vonn Hartung

<sup>20</sup> Commonweal Magazine. *Re-reading Laudato Si*. <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/re-reading-%E2%80%98laudato-si%E2%80%99-%E2%80%99/> (accessed November 10, 2018).

<sup>21</sup> Washington State University. *American Consumption*. <https://public.wsu.edu/~mreed/380American%20Consumption.htm> (accessed November 10, 2018).

violent storms.<sup>22</sup> According to the National Weather Service, in the past seven years, the United States has experienced 26 “five-hundred-year storms”.<sup>23</sup>

One of those “five-hundred-year” storms was Hurricane Maria which devastated Puerto Rico in 2017. Although Congress allotted \$5 billion in recovery aid to Puerto Rico, and a portion of \$36 billion allocated for several Caribbean islands damaged by Hurricanes Irma and Maria, the Puerto Rican government predicts it will take \$94 billion for the island to fully recover. Officially 64 people died in the storm, however, a recent Harvard study showed that there can be as many as 4,600 storm-related deaths.<sup>24</sup> Vonn Hartung reported that many people he knew left for the mainland and never returned and the suicide rate has tripled for those who remained. He explained that if you flew over Puerto Rico today you would see countless buildings with blue tarps still on them. These cover roofs waiting to be repaired...including the roof of his studio. Vonn Hartung said, “*Laudato Si* spelled it all out completely. Its message was clear and eloquently stated. It was a theological clarification of what all the science said, and for me Hurricane Maria slammed down the proof of it!”<sup>25</sup>

### Conclusion

*Laudato Si* and *On Earth as it is In Heaven* were created to raise awareness and call all people to action to address the problems of climate change. Both works show the need for an integral ecology where the problems of environmental degradation and ecological justice are addressed for the common good of the planet, for the flourishing of all of God’s creation, and for the dignity and growth of each individual human. Mary Evelyn Tucker of the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology explained, “The Pope is saying to the world that climate change brings moral change. The health of both people and the planet will require a transformation toward care for creation and concern for future generation.”<sup>26</sup> The challenge is to use our free will to leverage cooperation and global action in order to do the will of God.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Michael S. Norcott, *A Political Theology of Climate Change* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdsman Pub. Co, 2013), 2-4.

<sup>23</sup> NOAA’s National Weather Service. *Exceedance Probability Analysis for Selected Storm Events*  
[http://www.nws.noaa.gov/oh/hdsc/aep\\_storm\\_analysis/](http://www.nws.noaa.gov/oh/hdsc/aep_storm_analysis/) (accessed November 10, 2018).

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMsa1803972>

<sup>25</sup> Email from Vonn Hartung

<sup>26</sup> <https://environment.yale.edu/news/article/pope-francis-and-the-environment-why-his-new-climate-encyclical-matters>

<sup>27</sup> Erin Lothes Biviano, *Inspired Sustainability: Planting Seeds for Action* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016), 123.

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