Opinion
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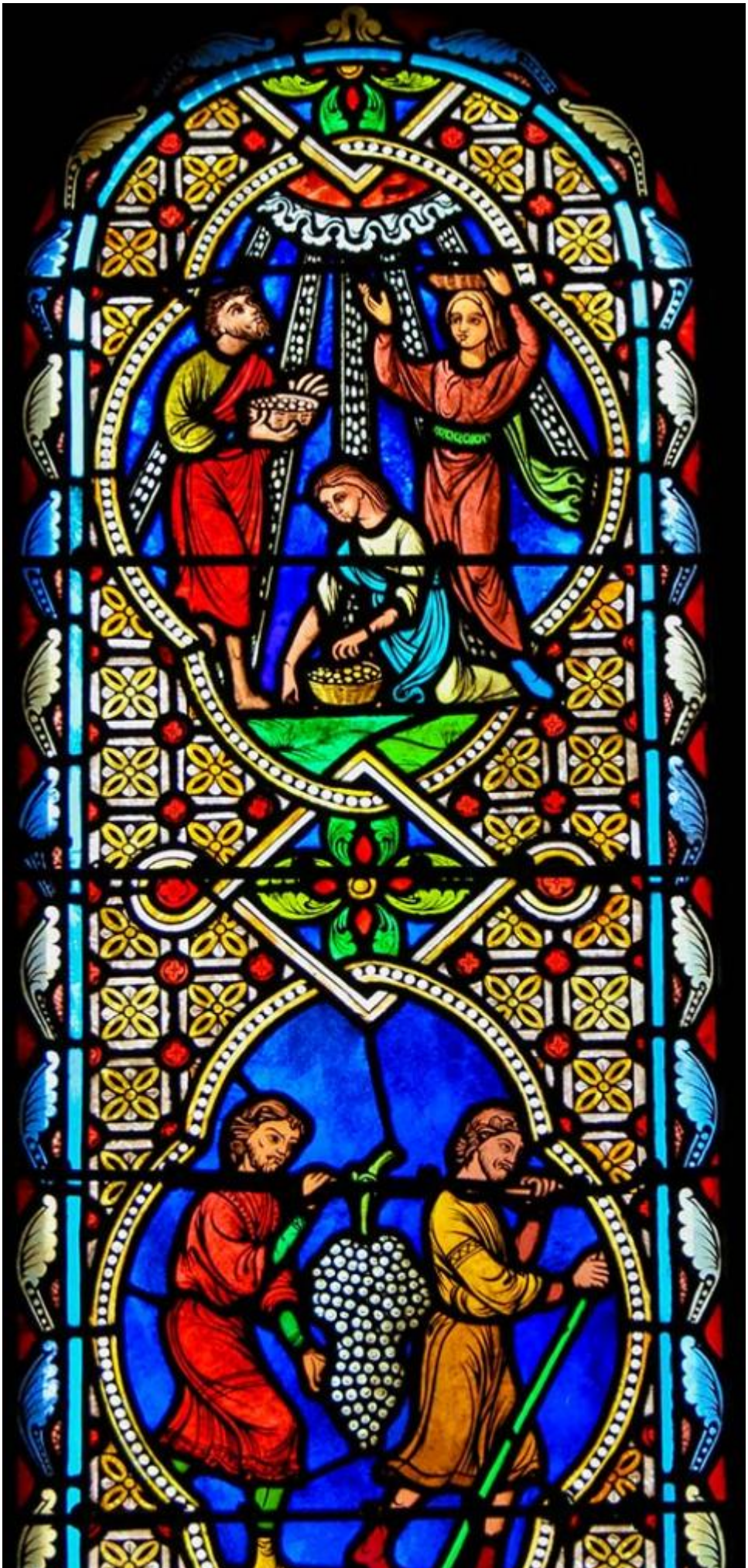
Our contemporary social and ecological challenges clearly call for significant changes in the way we live. But they also call for substantive changes in who we are. This means that although lifestyle changes and new ethical guidelines may be necessary, neither will be sufficient to address the challenges facing us. For that, we need a more radical and profound change of our humanity.

Pope Francis alludes to such change when he writes in his 2015 encyclical, "*Laudato Si*', on Care for Our Common Home," that we need a change of humanity and that "there can be no renewal of our relationship with nature without a renewal of humanity itself." He also calls for a new humanism to accompany this renewal and change.

His calls echo the words of Pope Benedict XVI, who astutely observed, "The external deserts in the world are growing because the internal deserts have become so vast."

But what does this mean? How can this change of humanity be brought about? And what should this new humanism look like? How does it differ from humanisms of old and the postmodern humanisms that currently threaten both our well-being and that of the world?

A response to these questions can be found — perhaps unexpectedly — in our celebration of the Eucharist.



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The Eucharist does not simply offer us a model for understanding what the necessary change of humanity entails and how this change will come about. Authentically sharing in the Eucharist is the very renewal of humanity we seek. And when we extend this celebration into every dimension and facet of our lives, the ground is prepared for a new humanism.

The Eucharist points us toward more than a new ethics or a new lifestyle. It points us toward a new heaven and a new earth, and toward the new humanity invited to dwell there. In the body and blood of Christ, all of creation is lifted up to God.

When we share in Communion, we turn away from nature as something to be possessed and mastered — and we turn toward creation as a gift we have received from our Creator, a gift calling for gratitude, care and oblation. This conversion reorients our relationship with the earth.

This conversion also reorients our relationship to ourselves. For we, too, are lifted up and transformed in Communion. The Eucharist reaches deep into our humanity — transforming the basic relationships constitutive of human existence — and draws us here and now into the promise of a new heaven and a new earth.

When we share in Communion, we also turn away from the zero-sum game of self-interested production and consumption in which we are pitted against one another — and we turn toward the sharing of creation, which God has ordained for the benefit of all.

In the sharing of the Eucharist, we can become the community we were destined to be. We can gather in the solidarity of communion, turning toward one another as sisters and brothers in Christ. This conversion reorients our relationships with one another.

And finally, when we share in the Eucharist, we turn toward the loving, incarnate God who invites us to share in our own authentic flourishing and accomplishment by sharing more fully in God's very life.

In Communion, we can find the strength and courage to turn away from the myriad false idols we worship. We turn away from willful self-assertion and toward humility

and obedience: "not as I will but as you will." We die to our old, selfish selves and rise as new selves centered around Christ's redemptive love. We turn toward the humility, obedience and love through which we share in Christ's saving mission. This conversion reorients our relationship with God.

These eucharistic reflections may seem like little more than pious sentiments or lofty ideals detached from reality. Yet whether we perceive it or not, through the Eucharist God reaches right into the heart of human existence. The Eucharist renews our humanity.

This renewal may begin around the altar, but it must not end there. For we are enjoined, in the concluding rites of the Mass, to carry the presence of the Eucharist out into the world and to weave it into the fabric of existence.

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When we extend our celebration of the Eucharist from the altar into our daily lives, we can begin to live eucharistically in a broader and deeper sense. We can integrate the nourishment that the Mass offers into all we do.

We then follow a lodestar that guides the lifestyle changes for which Francis and others call. We no longer see the goods of the earth as things to appropriate and control for our own benefit. Rather, we see creation as a gift given for the benefit of all. We see ourselves as called to share this gift in just and equitable ways.

We no longer look upon others with suspicion, seeking our own advantage in our dealings with them. Rather, we see others as brothers and sisters with whom we share a common destiny.

And we no longer imagine God as a distant and punitive force subjecting us to rules and laws that prevent us from flourishing. Rather, we experience a loving God who invites us to share more fully in divine life.

In short, the Eucharist is an invitation to live a Christ-centered life.

In living a Christ-centered life, we set out along the way toward a new humanism that avoids the deficiencies of old, anthropocentric humanisms as well as newer, yet

profoundly impoverished, postmodern humanisms that would either elevate humans in Promethean fashion or level all distinctions between humans and the rest of creation.

The humanism that emerges from a Christ-centered life gathers all of human experience and understanding into an integral vision that places human action not merely within an earthly or even cosmic account, but within a eucharistic vision of salvation. It assigns to humankind the role of lifting up all of creation to God in humility, obedience and love. And it assigns to those who share in Communion the mission of gathering humankind within the Catholic Church.

The Eucharist may not provide us with a simple and complete blueprint for more just and sustainable living. But it will nourish us with the bread of life, a bread that sustains our actions as we work for a more just and sustainable world. So when we think of the challenges facing us — ecological, social, spiritual — let us turn to the Eucharist both to renew and to guide our response.