

FOCUS ON ECOLOGY AND THE ONGOING RENEWAL OF MORAL THEOLOGY

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Abstract

This article focuses on the increased attention given by Moral Theology to the issues of ecology and the environmental crisis faced by the contemporary society. It tries to see how this increased focus is an integral part of the ongoing renewal of moral theology, which, according to the instruction of Vatican II, tries to answer current issues facing human beings with the help of the light of revelation and in the context of the faith in its integrity. It focuses on the history of the increased attention, the identification of the root cause of the crisis as a moral problem and proceeds to propose solutions in the light of faith.

Keywords: Ecology, Creation, Moral Theology, Revelation, Responsibility

1. Introduction

The increased focus of Moral Theology today, on Ecology and the environmental crisis is a development in keeping with the teaching of Vatican II, to “apply the eternal truth of revelation to the changeable conditions of human affairs.”¹ The Council had foreseen the need for guiding the increased powers of man over nature, since it could

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¹Vatican II, Decree on Priestly Training *Optatam Totius* (October 28, 1965) AAS 58 (1966) no. 16.

“enslave him or minister to him.”² It had warned about the danger of thinking that “created things do not depend on God, and that man can use them without any reference to their Creator.” It taught that created things “enjoy their own laws and values,” since all “things are endowed with their own stability, truth, goodness, proper laws and order” and that man must respect these laws which must be gradually deciphered, put to use, and regulated (GS, 36). The Council had proposed that human beings who were given authority over creation should exercise their stewardship with love, respect and reverence for the things created by God, possessing them as if possessing nothing at all (GS, 37). The increased focus on ecology in Moral Theology teaching today is in many ways, a result of the ecological crisis facing human existence. It is at the same time a recognition that the exercise of responsible stewardship of the environment can be a fitting response to the call to recognize the loftiness of the Christian vocation and the obligation to bear fruit in charity for the life of the world (OT, 16).

In this article, we will begin by looking at the history of increased attention given to the ecological problem, by the magisterium after Vatican II, and the close relationship between ecology and Christian faith. We will then focus on the eternal truth of revelation to see what it teaches about the relationships that should exist between human beings and nature. After considering the lessons taught by biblical revelation, we shall analyse the cause of the ecological crisis as seen from the perspective of Christian revelation and propose solutions based on the same revelation.

2. History of the Magisterial Teaching on Modern Environmental Issues

As societies were becoming more conscious of modern environmental issues, Pope Paul VI, in May 1971 spoke of the dramatic and unexpected consequence of human activity on the environment:

Man is suddenly becoming aware that by an ill-considered exploitation of nature he risks destroying it and becoming in his turn the victim of this degradation. Not only is the material environment becoming a permanent menace — pollution and refuse, new illness and absolute destructive capacity — but the human framework is no longer under man’s control, thus creating an environment for tomorrow which may well be intolerable. This is a wide-ranging social problem, which concerns the entire human family.

²Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes* (December 7, 1965) AAS 58 (1966) no. 9.

The Christian must turn to these new perceptions in order to take on responsibility, together with the rest of men, for a destiny which from now on is shared by all.³

In the context of the preparations for the first United Nations Conference on Human Environment at Stockholm in June 1972, the document "Justice in the World" produced by the 1971 Synod of Bishops in article 70 stressed the importance of giving attention to the emerging worldwide preoccupation on the environment. It spoke of the environment as a heritage belonging to all and the need to accept a less material way of life with less waste.⁴ The universal destination of all goods which underlies this teaching has been the understanding of the church from the very beginning and is affirmed by the Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: "God destined the earth and all it contains for all people and nations so that all created things would be shared fairly by all humankind under the guidance of justice tempered by charity."⁵

The papacy of John Paul II saw consistent teaching on respecting the environment. In 1979 he named Francis of Assisi the patron of the environment and in the same year, in his Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* treated the issue of pollution that threatens the natural environment.⁶ The Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo rei Socialis* in 1987 recognized the ecological consciousness as a positive sign of the times.⁷ John Paul II's 1990 message for the World Day of Peace⁸ is considered the first papal document dedicated entirely to the topic of ecology. In it he called for *the right to a safe environment* to be included in an updated Charter of Human Rights⁹ and asked Churches, religious bodies, non-governmental and governmental organizations, indeed all members of the society to take up education in ecological

³Paul VI, Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens* (May 14, 1971) AAS 63 (1971) no. 21.

⁴Synod of Catholic Bishops, "Justice in the World" <http://www.cctwincities.org/document.doc?id=69> [accessed: March 4, 2015].

⁵GS, 69; Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio* On the Development of Peoples (March 26, 1967) AAS 59 (1967) no. 22.

⁶John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (March 4, 1979) AAS 71 (1979) no. 8.

⁷John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, (December 30, 1987) AAS 80 (1988) no. 26. "Among today's positive signs we must also mention a greater realization of the limits of available resources, and of the need to respect the integrity and the cycles of nature and to take them into account when planning for development, rather than sacrificing them to certain demagogic ideas about the latter. Today this is called ecological concern."

⁸John Paul II, "Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace" (December 8, 1989) AAS 82 (1990) no. 15.

⁹John Paul II, "Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace," 9.

responsibility.¹⁰ In 1991 he spoke of the duty to care for the environment as a duty to future generations. "Each generation takes the natural environment on loan, and must return it after use in as well or better condition as when it was first borrowed."¹¹ In 2002 John Paul II together with Bartholomew I made a joint statement on the environment, calling for education to greater ecological awareness.¹²

Benedict XVI, known as the 'Green Pope'¹³ spoke of the earth, the environment, as the home given by God to the human family: "it has been entrusted to men and women to be protected and cultivated with responsible freedom, with the good of all as a constant guiding criterion."¹⁴ Just as John Paul II, Benedict XVI, saw a close link between respect for nature and world peace.¹⁵ Benedict XVI asserted in 2007, "There is an inseparable link between peace with creation and peace among men."¹⁶ In 2010 he reiterated, "If you want to cultivate peace, protect creation."¹⁷ He has developed the discourse on care for the environment through the concepts of 'solidarity,' 'inter-generational justice,' 'human ecology,' etc.¹⁸ Pope Francis following the steps of his predecessors has called for the protection of the environment and is

¹⁰John Paul II, "Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace," 13.

¹¹John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* On the Hundredth Anniversary of *Rerum Novarum* (May 1, 1991) AAS 83 (1991) no. 107.

¹²John Paul II & Bartholomew I, "Common Declaration on Environmental Ethics" (June 10, 2002) http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/2002/june/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20020610_venice-declaration_en.html [accessed: March 5, 2015].

¹³William L. Patenaude, "The 'Green Pope' and a Human Ecology," http://www.catholicworldreport.com/Item/3087/The_Green_Pope_and_a_Human_Ecology.aspx [accessed March 5, 2015]. A new book, *The Garden of God: Toward a Human Ecology*, compiles together the many statements of Benedict XVI on preserving life on earth. Cf. Benedict XVI, *The Garden of God: Towards a Human Ecology* with Foreword by Archbishop Jean-Louis Brugues, Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2014.

¹⁴Benedict XVI, Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace (January 1, 2008) no. 7 http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20071208_xli-world-day-peace_en.html [accessed 5 March 2015]. Benedict used the expression of environment as "home" of humanity in keeping with the Greek meaning of the word "ecology" which means "study of the house."

¹⁵John Paul II, "Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace," 1, 6.

¹⁶Benedict XVI, "Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace (January 1, 2007) no. 8 http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20061208_xl-world-day-peace.html [accessed March 5, 2015].

¹⁷Benedict XVI, Message for Celebration of the World Day of Peace (January 1, 2010) no. 14 http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20091208_xliii-world-day-peace.html [accessed March 5, 2015].

¹⁸Of particular importance is *Caritas in Veritate*. Cf. Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate* On Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth (June 29, 2009) AAS 101 (2009).

said to be working on an Encyclical letter dedicated to the care of the environment.¹⁹

We now move to see the reason for this constant and growing attention to ecology, namely, the close relationship between the Christian faith and ecology.

3. Integral Relation between Ecology and the Christian Faith

Ecology and the Christian Faith are integrally related. John Paul II has taught that all believers in a creator God particularly Christians are called to recognize “their responsibility within creation and their duty towards nature and the Creator as an essential part of their faith.”²⁰ He explained how the obligation to care for all creation is an essential part of Christian faith:

The commitment of believers to a healthy environment for everyone stems directly from their belief in God the Creator, from their recognition of the effects of original and personal sin, and from the certainty of having been redeemed by Christ. Respect for life and for the dignity of the human person extends also to the rest of creation, which is called to join man in praising God (cf. Ps 148:96).²¹

Since this is true of all faiths that believe in a creator God, restoration of a healthy environment is a vast field for ecumenical and interreligious cooperation.²² Hence, John Paul II, together with Patriarch Bartholomew I of the Orthodox Church declared: “In our own time we are witnessing a growth of an *ecological awareness* which needs to be encouraged, so that it will lead to practical programmes and initiatives.”²³ Following his predecessors, Pope Francis has said, “Small yet strong in the love of God, like Saint Francis of Assisi, all of us, as Christians, are called to watch over and protect the fragile world in which we live, and all its peoples.”²⁴ The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that respect for the integrity of creation is enjoined by the seventh commandment.²⁵

¹⁹Rome Reports, “Pope Francis Prepares Encyclical on the Ecology for start of 2015” <http://www.romereports.com/pg157684-pope-francis-prepares-encyclical-on-the-ecology-for-start-of-2015-en> [accessed October 25, 2014]. Latest reports indicate that it will be published in the summer of 2015.

²⁰John Paul II, “Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace,” 15.

²¹John Paul II, “Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace,” 16.

²²John Paul II, “Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace,” 15.

²³John Paul II, “Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace,” 1; Cf. John Paul II & Bartholomew I, “Common Declaration on Environmental Ethics.”

²⁴Francis, Encyclical Letter *Evangelii Gaudium*, (November 24, 2013) 216 http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html [accessed March 5, 2015].

²⁵CCC, 2415. “You shall not steal” (Ex 20:15; Deut 5:19; Mt 19:18).

Religion and the obligation to care for the environment are inseparably connected also for another reason. The ecological question has brought back to our attention the intrinsic, objective laws of nature that need to be respected in the way we treat nature.²⁶ Religions have argued for an objective intrinsic law in nature as given by God. In the Catholic tradition it is referred to as Natural Law. The moral principles proposed by religions are based on an understanding that there is in the universe an order willed by its creator that is to be respected by all.

4. Biblical Foundations²⁷

The Catholic Church's concern for the environment — as we have noted above in the statement of John Paul II²⁸ — is an essential part of its faith and is guided by biblical revelation on creation, human sin and redemption. We shall now examine these three aspects.

4.1. God Created Everything and Placed Man and Woman as His Responsible Representatives

The account of creation attests that everything in nature is good because after the creation of each the scripture repeats the refrain "And God saw that it was good" (cf. Gen 1:25). The Bible often speaks of the beauty and goodness of creation (cf. Ps 8:2; 104:1ff; Wis 13:3-5; Sir 39:16). The entire universe contains traces of the word through whom all things were made (cf. Jn 1:2). But with the creation of man and woman, the refrain changes to "it was very good" (Gen 1:31). Man and woman, the first human couple after whose creation everything is said to be "very good" (Gen 1:31) was entrusted the care of the earth (cf. Gen 1: 26-30).²⁹

It is only after creating man and woman and entrusting the whole of creation to them that God "rested from all his work" (Gen 2:3). Gen 2:15 speaks of God placing man in the Garden of Eden to cultivate and care for it. What does this mean? "The verb "cultivate," according to Pope Francis means "the care a farmer takes to ensure that his land will be productive and that his produce will be

²⁶Renato Raffaele Martino, "Ecology in the Light of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church: Man in Relation to the World," *L'Osservatore Romano*, English Edition 16 July 2008, 9.

²⁷*Gaudium et Spes* speaks of the Church drawing moral principles from God's word even when she does not have solutions to particular problems. Cf. GS, 33.

²⁸John Paul II, "Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace," 16.

²⁹Verse 30 indicates that human beings were initially meant to be vegetarians, but 9:3 indicates a change when God says: "Any living creature that moves about shall be yours to eat: I give them all to you as I did the green plants" (Gen 9:3).

shared.”³⁰ In fact, this call to share in the unfolding of God’s creative plan resulted in the development of the abilities and gifts that distinguish the human being from other creatures.³¹

The Psalmist expresses the unique role of man in the cosmos (Ps 8:6-9; 115:16). Solomon’s prayer in the book of Wisdom also shows the honoured place of human beings in creation (Wis 9:1-3). The story of Noah illustrates care of the creation being entrusted to human beings (Gen 7:1-3; 8:15-17).

Based on this revealed knowledge, Vatican II asserted the superiority of human beings in creation. Man “judges rightly that by his intellect he surpasses the material universe, for he shares in the light of the divine mind” (GS, 15). This mastery over nature continues to be extended with the help of science and technology (GS, 33).

The Church sees human work to improve living conditions as rightful and as prolongation of the work of the creator and a contribution to the fulfilment in history of the divine plan (GS, 34, 58). “Christians are convinced that the achievements of the human race are a sign of God’s greatness and the fulfilment of his mysterious design. The more the power of men and women increases the greater is their responsibility as individuals and as members of the community” (GS, 34). But this is not the end of the story.

4.2. Human Beings Fail in their Responsibility

The call to Adam and Eve was to govern with piety, wisdom and righteousness (cf. Wis 9:3) but they sinned and as a result they suffered alienation from themselves (death and fratricide), and also from the earth (cf. Gen 3:17-19; 4:11-12). Creation became subject to futility (cf. Gen 3:17-19, 4:11-12) and continues to groan in labour pains even as it awaits freedom from slavery to corruption (cf. Rom 8:20-21).³² After sin, pain and suffering are added to the duty to cultivate the earth; the duty is not removed.³³ (cf. Gen 3:17-19; 4:11-12). This too, is not the end of the story.

4.3. Salvation Brought by the Death of Christ is for all — Including all of Creation

Salvation is seen as removal of the disharmony brought by sin and so is spoken of as a new creation: “I create new heavens and a new

³⁰Francis, “General Audience” (June 5, 2013) http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130605_udienza-generale.html [accessed March 5, 2015].

³¹John Paul II, “Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace,” 3.

³²John Paul II, “Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace,” 3.

³³Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2010, no. 452.

earth" (Is 65:17).³⁴ Nature that shares with human beings in redemption is seen to participate in the drama of the rejection of the Son of God and in the victory of his resurrection (Mt 27:45; 27:51-52).³⁵

Christians believe that in the death of Christ all things are reconciled to God (cf. Col 1:19-20) and creation that was once subjected to bondage of sin and decay (cf. Rom 8:21) is made new (cf. Rev 21:5). But we wait according to his promise for the "new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Pt 3:13). At the fullness of time all things in heaven and earth will be united in Christ (cf. Eph 1:9-10; Col 1:19-20). The book of Revelation speaks of the same: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev 21:1).

Until the arrival of the new heaven and new earth, human beings are called to work hard to establish that harmony by carrying out the duty to cultivate the earth. The parable of the workers in the vineyard exemplifies this duty (cf. Lk 20:9-16). God has given the environment as a gift to human beings, just as in the parable, the man gives a well prepared vineyard to the tenants. The tenants have a duty to render account. An adequate response to the trust involved in the giving of that gift is expected. Many atrocities are forgiven, but one day, each man and woman will have to account for the way he or she treated the gift of God.

5. Conclusions drawn from the Biblical Revelation

God has given nature as a gift to human beings to make their home in it. Nature is prior to the existence of human beings and speaks to us of the Creator (cf. Rom 1:20) who gave it to us. "*Nature expresses a design of love and truth*"³⁶ — a truth of the order that is inbuilt and of the love that gives us a home. Truth and love are not human products; we receive both as gifts from its source, namely God who is truth and love. It reveals to us what true goodness is and in what our true happiness consists.³⁷

Benedictine and Franciscan spirituality in the Christian culture sees other creatures as gifts of God to be nurtured and safeguarded and helps cultivate a sense of kinship between man and the environment and calls for an attitude of respect for every reality.³⁸ The patron of

³⁴*Compendium*, no. 452. Isaiah spoke of the messianic time as a time of harmony between all creatures.

³⁵*Compendium*, no. 454.

³⁶Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 48.

³⁷Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 52.

³⁸John Paul II, Address to the participants in a convention on "The Environment and Health" (March 24, 1997) *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 9 April 1997, 2; *Compendium*, no. 464.

ecology, St Francis of Assisi's Cantic of Brother Sun is inspiring.³⁹ Because God is the creator and creation is given as a gift to human beings to care for and cultivate, the relationship between human beings and the world is a constitutive part of the identity of men and women. Because God made human being a partner in looking after creation, the relationship between human beings and God gives rise to an intrinsic relationship of human beings and nature.⁴⁰

Among others, we can speak of three important concerns of the ecological movement that demand respect for nature.⁴¹

a) *There is an intrinsic order of nature.* We cannot use the living or inanimate beings simply as we wish according to our whims. The cosmos⁴² is an ordered system with all beings mutually connected in that ordered system.

b) *Natural resources are limited.* Some of the resources are renewable, but not all of them are. Using them as if they are all inexhaustible endangers their availability for the present generation and for future generations.

c) *Environmental degradation poses a serious threat.* Pollution of nature even when done in the name of development poses a serious threat to nature among which is also the health and quality of life of the human beings.

These three demands are written into the way God has revealed his plan in revelation. God is the Lord of creation. Man is a steward who will be asked for an accounting. In addition to responsibilities to care for creation, there are moral limits to how man can use nature. "The dominion granted to man by the Creator is not an absolute power, nor can one speak of a freedom to "use and misuse," or to dispose of things as one pleases. The limitation imposed from the beginning by the Creator himself and expressed symbolically by the prohibition not to "eat of the fruit of the tree" (cf. Gen 2:16-17) shows clearly enough that, when it comes to the natural world, we are subject not only to biological laws but also to moral ones, which cannot be violated with impunity."⁴³ This demands that man must always remember that "his capacity to transform and in a certain sense create

³⁹Francis of Assisi, "The Cantic of the Creatures" <http://www.custodia.org/?id=1454> [accessed March 5, 2015].

⁴⁰*Compendium*, no. 452.

⁴¹John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 34.

⁴²The Greek philosopher Pythagoras used the term 'cosmos' to refer to the universe precisely to show the order that exists within the universe.

⁴³John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 34.

the world through his own work ... is always based on God's prior and original gift of the things that are."⁴⁴ Therefore we need to take into account "the *nature of each being* and of its *mutual connection* in an ordered system."⁴⁵ Man must be aware that each thing in nature has a prior God-given purpose which can be developed but not betrayed. When man forgets this and begins to treat nature arbitrarily for his own benefit, he betrays God's trust and instead of co-operating with God in the work of creation man sets himself as God, "provoking rebellion on the part of nature, which is more tyrannized than governed by him."⁴⁶

The believer recognizes in nature the wonderful creative activity of God which one may use responsibly to meet one's legitimate needs, provided the intrinsic balance of creation is respected. The creator who has given it an inbuilt order also enables man to draw from it the principles needed in order "to till and keep it" (Gen 2:15). Because creation is given as a gift to all of humanity, the use of it brings (along with the duty to respect the order of creation), a responsibility towards the poor (universal destination of goods), to future generations (intergenerational justice) and to humanity as a whole (solidarity).⁴⁷

From the biblical understanding and the concerns of ecological crisis the Church proposes the following areas for attention.

5.1. Care for the Environment is a Common Responsibility of Humanity

The environment is a common good given as a gift to mankind by God and hence caring for it is a common and universal duty. Since all beings are interdependent in the universal order established by the creator, no one should be left free to arbitrarily use nature according to one's economic needs. "One must take into account the nature of each being and of its mutual connection in an ordered system, which is precisely the 'cosmos.'"⁴⁸ Such an attitude is able to recognize the great value of biodiversity in the world. Each person is thus able to identify with the importance of forests like the Amazon, "one of the world's most precious natural regions because of its biodiversity which makes it vital for the environmental balance of the entire planet."⁴⁹

⁴⁴John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 37; *Compendium*, no. 460.

⁴⁵John Paul II, *Sollicitudinei Socialis*, 34.

⁴⁶John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 37; *Compendium*, no. 460.

⁴⁷Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 48.

⁴⁸John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei Socialis*, 34.

⁴⁹John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America* (January 22, 1999) AAS 91 (1999) 25. *Compendium*, no. 466.

5.2. Care for the Environment is a Responsibility also to Future Generations

The environment is a common heritage of mankind and so it should be used not only for present needs but also for the future. Since we have inherited from the past and from the work of our contemporaries, we have a duty to those who come after us. The church recognizes that each individual, State and the international community have a responsibility to take care of the environment *for the good of future generations*.⁵⁰

5.3. The Principle of the Universal Destination of Goods

The earth with its fruitfulness and capacity to satisfy human needs was given by God to the human race for the sustenance of all its members without exclusion or favouritism. This forms the foundation of the universal destination of the earth's goods.⁵¹ All goods must therefore be shared equitably with justice and charity. The second Vatican Council — as we have noted earlier⁵² — acknowledged this when it said, "God destined the earth and all it contains for the use of every individual and all peoples."⁵³ In fact, the very concept of the right to private property is derived jointly from the right to use the goods of the earth and the respect for human dignity.⁵⁴ The current ecological crisis is a proof of how greed and selfishness — individual and collective — is contrary to the order of creation characterised by mutual interdependence.⁵⁵ Given the extent of the ecological crisis today, there is need for greater international coordination in the shared use of the earth's resources.

The poor are the victims of ecological imbalances. They are often the victims of the lack of respect that individuals and groups give to the principle of the universal destination of goods. Hoarding of natural resources by rich nations and multi-nationals or the rich within poorer nations is a serious problem.⁵⁶ Further, the poor people are often the victims affected by the ecological crisis that is mostly caused by greed. It is often the poor people who live in lands affected by erosion and desertification. They are often living in polluted

⁵⁰*Compendium*, no. 467. Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, no. 17. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, no. 37.

⁵¹John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 31.

⁵²See section in this article on the history of the Church's teaching on care for the earth.

⁵³*Gaudium et Spes*, 69.

⁵⁴John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra* (May 15, 1961) AAS 53 (1961) 114; Cf. Pius XII, Broadcast message, (December 24, 1942) AAS 35 (1943), no. 17.

⁵⁵John Paul II, "Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace," 8.

⁵⁶Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 49.

suburbs of large cities. They often do not have the economic and technological means to protect themselves from calamities.⁵⁷

Subsistence farming and exhaustion of the soil are often the result of rural poverty and unjust distribution of land in many countries. Deforestation is resorted to by farmers when their land becomes unproductive. Sometimes the poor move to urban centres that have inadequate infrastructure to receive them leading to the creation of slums. Highly indebted countries too often resort to deforestation in the search of exploiting natural resources to pay back debts. Blaming the poor for environmental crisis is a wrong approach; courageous reform of structures to help the poor come out of their poverty is needed.⁵⁸

Among the poor who are affected by urbanization, assimilation and powerful agro-industrial interests are the indigenous peoples. They offer us an example of a life lived in harmony with nature. Since their lands are an integral part of their very identity, their rights to land and resources should be guaranteed. If their rights are not guaranteed, the extraordinary experience of living in harmony with nature that these people offer will be lost to humanity and the environments from which these people originate will also disappear.⁵⁹

Environmental crisis and poverty are connected by a complex and dramatic set of causes. The principle of the universal destination of goods can be a fundamental moral and cultural guide to resolve both poverty and environmental degradation.⁶⁰

5.4. Need for a New Solidarity

Solidarity that proceeds from an understanding of the principle of the universal destination of goods is another moral imperative in the face of the ecological crisis. Industrialized States have a duty to apply restrictive environmental standards first in their own territories. Newly industrialized States are also not morally free to repeat the errors that others made in the past. World leaders have to be convinced of the need for such a new solidarity to overcome the ecological crisis.⁶¹

5.5. Sharing of Non-Renewable Energy Resources

The above principles of universal destination of goods, solidarity, and responsibility to future generations call for special care for the use of non-renewable natural resources, particularly energy resources. Equity and intergenerational solidarity should be kept in

⁵⁷*Compendium*, no. 482.

⁵⁸John Paul II, "Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace, 11.

⁵⁹*Compendium*, no. 471.

⁶⁰*Compendium*, no. 482.

⁶¹John Paul II, "Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace," 10.

mind in the use of non-renewable energy resources, particularly by the more industrialized nations. There is also an urgent need to identify alternative sources of energy, particularly renewable sources. Security levels of nuclear energy sources should be upgraded.⁶²

5.6. Care for the Environment should Find Adequate Expression on a Juridical Level

To be effective, care for the earth should be enshrined also in national and international law. The church recognizes and supports “*the right to a safe and healthy natural environment.*”⁶³ The juridical content of this right is yet to be established in keeping with the demands of the common good. The international community is called to draw up uniform rules to reduce activities that have negative effect on the environment, to protect ecosystems and prevent accidents. Individual States too have to be vigilant on the use of new technological or scientific advances.⁶⁴ While stressing the importance of a juridical approach, it should also be remembered that by themselves they are not sufficient.⁶⁵

5.7. Respect for Nature in Programmes of Economic Development

Human ingenuity has helped to make great progress in meeting human need. But the ecological crisis we are facing has brought to our attention that economic models based on consumerism have grave consequences. Natural resources are limited and some are not renewable and so economic programs should “respect the integrity and the cycles of nature”⁶⁶ and should go hand in hand with environmental protection, counting the required costs as cost of production.⁶⁷ Maximisation of financial profit cannot be the only objective of an economy that respects environmental protection. Market forces alone do not guarantee care for the environment⁶⁸ and therefore innovative ways to reduce environmental impact of production and consumption should be encouraged everywhere.⁶⁹

⁶²*Compendium*, no. 470.

⁶³John Paul II, *Address to the European Commission and Court of Human Rights*, Strasbourg (8 October 1988) AAS 81 (1989) 5; cf. John Paul II, “Message for the 1999 World Day of Peace,” (January 1, 1999) AAS 91 (1999) 10; *Compendium*, no. 468.

⁶⁴*Compendium*, no. 468; John Paul II, “Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace,” no. 9.

⁶⁵John Paul II, “Message for the 1999 World Day of Peace,” (January 1, 1999) AAS 91 (1999) 10.

⁶⁶John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei Socialis*, 26.

⁶⁷*Compendium*, 470.

⁶⁸John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 40.

⁶⁹*Compendium*, no. 470.

5.8. Environmental Crisis and Population Growth

The church insists on respecting the dignity of the human person even in the context of the close link that exists between development of the poorest countries, demographic changes and sustainable use of the environment. Demographic growth “is fully compatible with an integral and shared development.”⁷⁰ Benedict XVI has summarised the Church’s stand on population in the context of the care for the environment:

Human beings legitimately exercise a *responsible stewardship over nature*, in order to protect it, to enjoy its fruits and to cultivate it in new ways, with the assistance of advanced technologies, so that it can worthily accommodate and feed the world’s population. On this earth there is room for everyone: here the entire human family must find the resources to live with dignity, through the help of nature itself — God’s gift to his children — and through hard work and creativity. At the same time we must recognize our grave duty to hand the earth on to future generations in such a condition that they too can worthily inhabit it and continue to cultivate it. This means being committed to making joint decisions “after pondering responsibly the road to be taken, decisions aimed at strengthening that *covenant between human beings and the environment*, which should mirror the creative love of God, from whom we come and towards whom we are journeying.⁷¹

Population should not be seen as the primary cause of underdevelopment. Many nations are coming out of poverty thanks to the hard work and talents of their large populations and formerly rich nations are suffering for their dwindling populations. Morally responsible openness to life⁷² is proposed by the Church. Responsible parenthood⁷³ is part of this openness to life.

5.9. The Role of Science and Technology

The Church recognizes that technology and science can be priceless tools in solving many serious problems like hunger and disease.⁷⁴ There are many advantages that have resulted from and can result from further study and application of molecular biology, genetics, etc.⁷⁵ While recognizing these advantages the church is aware that

⁷⁰John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 25; *Compendium*, 483.

⁷¹Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 50.

⁷²Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 44.

⁷³Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Humanae Vitae*, On the Regulation of Birth (July 25, 1968) AAS 60 (1968) 10.

⁷⁴John Paul II, Address to the participants in a convention sponsored by the National Academy of Sciences, for the bicentenary of its foundation (September 21, 1982) *L’Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 4 October 1982, 3; *Compendium*, no. 458.

⁷⁵John Paul II, Address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences (October 3, 1981), *L’Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 12 October 1981, 4; *Compendium*, no. 458.

science and technology are not neutral and that they can be used either for man's progress or for his degradation.⁷⁶ Science and technology should therefore be subordinate to moral principles and values aimed at serving humanity.⁷⁷ "Respect for life, and above all for the dignity of the human person, is the ultimate guiding norm for any sound economic, industrial or scientific progress... No peaceful society can afford to neglect either respect for life or the fact that there is an integrity to creation."⁷⁸ Ethical principles have to guide human action in the field of science and technology.

The Use of Biotechnology: Given the widespread impact of biotechnology on living organisms, it should always accurately evaluate accurately all the long-term repercussions with the greatest responsibility.⁷⁹ Scientists and technicians in the field of biotechnology are therefore called to work hard with perseverance to find the best solutions to solve the problems of food supply and health care.⁸⁰ In the spirit of international solidarity, equity should be practiced in the distribution of the benefits of biotechnology particularly to poorer nations; it should not limit itself to exchange of products but also technology. In turn, the poorer nations should also dedicate resources for research in this field and policy decisions at the political level should favour food supply and health. While some such interventions have had great beneficial impact, biotechnology should not be seen as the solution to all urgent problems like poverty and underdevelopment that afflict so many peoples.⁸¹

The Use of the Precautionary Principle: often it is difficult to calculate the environmental risks involved in technological or scientific advances. In such situations, the decision making process should be made transparent and the "precautionary principle" should be applied. The precautionary principle demands that every effort be made to acquire better knowledge of the risks involved. The decisions made based on the precautionary principle are to be temporary with the possibility of modification based on new facts that eventually become known.⁸²

⁷⁶John Paul II, Meeting with scientists and representatives of the United Nations University, Hiroshima (February 25, 1981), AAS 73 (1981), 3; *Compendium*, no. 458.

⁷⁷John Paul II, Address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences (October 23, 1982), *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, V, 3 (1982) no. 5, 892-893; *Compendium*, no. 458.

⁷⁸John Paul II, "Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace," 7.

⁷⁹*Compendium*, no. 473.

⁸⁰*Compendium*, no. 477.

⁸¹*Compendium*, no. 474.

⁸²*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 469.

6. The Cause of the Ecological Crisis Seen from the Perspective of Christian Revelation

The Christian sees the cause of the ecological crisis in the human forgetfulness of God as creator. When God is placed out of the relationship (God-man-nature), two paths emerge: to exploit nature purely as a resource, or to enter into neo-paganism or a new pantheism that sets up nature as an untouchable taboo or as a deity or to see no unique value in human beings.⁸³

The first path emerges when man begins to live as if God did not exist. Man begins to exploit and disfigure nature failing to see in creation the handiwork of God or the traces of the word through whom all things were made (cf. Jn 1:2).⁸⁴ When God as creator is removed from the scene, man begins to think he has 'unconditional dominion' over creation. The world is then seen as a mere evolutionary chance that permits total technological dominion. Pretended unconditional dominion prevents man from respecting moral considerations that should govern and distinguish all human activity.⁸⁵ The intrinsic order enshrined by the creator and the moral demands on the use of creation that respects the internal order of each being and their interdependence fades from sight.⁸⁶ The will of God that "man should communicate with nature as an intelligent and noble 'master' and 'guardian', and not as a heedless 'exploiter' and 'destroyer'"⁸⁷ is forgotten. In the search for absolute control and power, such a system devours everything that stands in the way of increased profits. Everything that "is fragile, like the environment, is defenceless before the interests of a deified market, which becomes the only rule."⁸⁸ In turn, "the environment as 'resource' risks threatening the environment as 'home'."⁸⁹ This is clearly the situation we face today. Indiscriminate exploitation of nature has led to the ecological crisis that has made the earth, the human home precarious.

⁸³Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 48.

⁸⁴Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Exhortation *Verbum Domini* (September 30, 2010) AAS 102 (2010) 108. Benedict XVI here speaks of accepting the word of God as attested to by Scripture and the tradition of the church as a way to authentic ecology.

⁸⁵*Compendium*, 461; Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens*, 21.

⁸⁶Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 48.

⁸⁷John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, 15. Already in 1961, Pope John XXIII had said that the command to "Fill the earth and subdue it" did not mean destroying nature. Cf. John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, 196-197.

⁸⁸Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 56.

⁸⁹John Paul II, Address to the participants in a convention on "The Environment and Health," 2. *Compendium*, no. 461.

This hedonistic attitude that sees the environment only as resource to be exploited has developed as a result of a long historical and cultural process in our society.⁹⁰ A correct understanding of the environment is needed to avoid the utilitarian reduction of nature to a mere object to be manipulated and exploited.⁹¹ This correct understanding is possible only when the transcendent nature of man and the relationship with God is maintained. When the fact of creation is denied, the relationships between God and man, between man and nature fades. "It is the relationship man has with God that determines his relationship with his fellow men and with his environment."⁹²

Speaking of the second mentality that sees no greater value in the human being, John Paul II said,

It is being proposed that the ontological and axiological difference between men and other living beings be eliminated, since the biosphere is considered a biotic unity of undifferentiated value. Thus man's superior responsibility can be eliminated in favour of an egalitarian consideration of the 'dignity' of all living beings.⁹³

In such a situation, there will be no role for man's creative activity that makes nature produce more, or preserves another species from extinction. Human work itself could lose meaning. We live in a society in which the role of human work has become so very important. We have moved from a time when the natural fruitfulness of the earth was the primary factor of material wealth to a time when possession of know-how, technology and skill determine wealth.⁹⁴ Working with and for others has become so much a part of our life that it cannot be without a deeper purpose.

One offshoot of a view that sees no special role for human beings is a neo-pagan approach that sees nature itself as superior, as a deity that cannot be touched. This too does not explain the human responsibility to care for the earth and the environment.

The Christian vision does not sacrifice the unique role of human beings in the universe. It sees the human being endowed with reason, and formed of matter and spirit, as the one given the responsibility to care for the earth. "Human interventions that damage living beings

⁹⁰*Compendium*, no. 461.

⁹¹*Compendium*, no. 463.

⁹²John Paul II, Address to the participants in a convention on "The Environment and Health," 2. *Compendium*, no. 464.

⁹³John Paul II, Address to participants in a convention on "The Environment and Health," 2.

⁹⁴John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 31-32.

or the natural environment deserve condemnation, while those that improve them are praiseworthy.”⁹⁵ Benedict XVI therefore taught:

Human beings, obviously, are of supreme worth vis-à-vis creation as a whole. Respecting the environment does not mean considering material or animal nature more important than man. Rather, it means not selfishly considering nature to be at the complete disposal of our own interests, for future generations also have the right to reap its benefits and to exhibit towards nature the same responsible freedom that we claim for ourselves.⁹⁶

The church, even in the face of being accused of anthropocentrism, is convinced of this superior responsibility of human beings over other creatures (animate or inanimate) to safeguard the environment.

If humanity today succeeds in combining the new scientific capacities with a strong ethical dimension, it will certainly be able to promote the environment as a home and a resource for man and for all men, and will be able to eliminate the causes of pollution and to guarantee adequate conditions for hygiene and health for small groups as well as for vast human settlements. Technology that pollutes can also cleanse, production that amasses can also distribute justly, on condition that the ethic of respect for life and human dignity, for the rights of today's generations and those to come, prevails.⁹⁷

7. The Ecological Crisis is a Moral Problem

Given the above analysis, the Church sees the ecological crisis as a moral problem that has to do with the use of human freedom. The destruction of the environment is itself a troubling aspect of the profound moral crisis affecting humanity.⁹⁸ Industrial waste, burning of fossil fuels, unrestricted deforestation, use of certain types of herbicides, coolants and propellants, etc. have given rise to a depletion of the ozone layer and cause the greenhouse effect that has reached a crisis point. Economic interests outweigh the dignity of workers and entire peoples and cause pollution and environmental destruction. Reckless exploitation of natural resources resulting in the destruction of delicate ecological balances by the destruction of animal and plant life, even when done in the name of progress, leads to damaging humankind itself. Indiscriminate genetic manipulation and biological research also threatens the entire environment and

⁹⁵*Compendium*, no. 473.

⁹⁶Benedict XVI, “Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace,” 7.

⁹⁷John Paul II, Address to participants in a convention on “The Environment and Health,” 2.

⁹⁸John Paul II, “Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace,” 6-7.

humanity in particular.⁹⁹ This has “led to the painful realization that we cannot interfere in one area of the ecosystem without paying due attention both to the consequences of such interference in other areas and to the well-being of future generations.”¹⁰⁰ We are not able to determine the long-term effects of developing new forms of plant and animal life through genetic manipulation. Great caution has to be exercised in the choices we make, and in the way we act.

War as cause of ecological crisis also points to a moral crisis. Chemical, biological and bacteriological weapons continue to be produced throughout the world despite international prohibition of these. These weapons have the capacity to alter the balance of nature. Every form of war ends in destruction not only of human life but also of land, crops and vegetation, often poisoning water and soil.¹⁰¹

8. Proposed Solution: Human Ecology — Environmental Ecology

The solution has to be based on the diagnosis, that the ecological crisis is a moral crisis that is rooted in an “anthropological error” that consists in human being’s forgetfulness that his capacities to transform the environment through his own work are always based on God’s prior gift of all things that exist. Human being, instead of cooperating with the creator, sets himself in the place of God.¹⁰² Without recognizing God the creator, we cannot discern an objective moral order that will be the foundation for articulating a code of environmental ethics.¹⁰³

Respect for the order of creation which includes an order not only for nature but also for the human being is the only way to solve the crisis. The most important and decisive issue therefore is “the overall moral tenor of society.”¹⁰⁴ The overall moral tenor of the society is dependent on what John Paul II and Benedict XVI and recently, Francis have called ‘human ecology.’ Human ecology refers to the natural and moral structure with which God endowed human beings.¹⁰⁵ Just as we are called to use the earth according to the original good purpose that God had for it, we must also respect the original good purpose God has for human beings by safeguarding the moral conditions for an authentic human life.

⁹⁹John Paul II, “Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace,” 7.

¹⁰⁰John Paul II, “Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace,” 6.

¹⁰¹John Paul II, “Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace,” 12; Cf. Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 51.

¹⁰²John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 37

¹⁰³John Paul II & Bartholomew I, “Common Declaration on Environmental Ethics.”

¹⁰⁴Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 51.

¹⁰⁵John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 38.

Today human ecology is endangered. The crisis is deeply rooted in ethics and anthropology and not simply in economics and development. In our 'culture of waste'¹⁰⁶ men and women are being sacrificed to the idols of profit and consumption. Threats to the right to life from conception, right to a natural death, right to being born out of love of married parents, etc. are signs of this crisis. This crisis is so great that there is an urgency today to safeguard the moral conditions for an authentic human life just as we are concerned about preserving the natural habitats of various animal species threatened with extinction.¹⁰⁷

Respect for 'human ecology' will lead to respect for 'environmental ecology'. "The deterioration of nature is in fact closely connected to the culture that shapes human coexistence: *when 'human ecology' is respected within society, environmental ecology also benefits.*"¹⁰⁸

"Every violation of solidarity and civic friendship harms the environment, just as environmental deterioration in turn upsets relations in society."¹⁰⁹ As for example, violation of solidarity in war, or hoarding through greed leads to deterioration of the environment and environmental deterioration leads to pollution that makes life difficult and causes class struggles in the context of immigration. We have also seen how desertification, deforestation, etc. are often the result of impoverishment and how development can help in turn, to protect nature itself.

When we do not help future generations to respect themselves it is not realistic to expect that they will learn to respect the environment. This is the reason for arguing that respect for creation will stem from respect for human life and dignity. In this sense educating people in ecological awareness, is educating them to responsibility towards self, towards others, towards creation.¹¹⁰ The close connection between 'environmental ecology' and 'human ecology'¹¹¹ has to be better understood. "Our duties towards the environment are linked to our duties towards the human person, considered in himself and in relation to others."¹¹²

A clear understanding of the issues is essential to understand the insistence on 'human ecology'. There is a tendency to brush it aside as

¹⁰⁶Francis, General Audience 5 June 2013 http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130605_udienza-generale.html [accessed: March 5, 2015]

¹⁰⁷John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 37

¹⁰⁸Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 51.

¹⁰⁹John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 38.

¹¹⁰John Paul II & Bartholomew I, "Common Declaration on Environmental Ethics."

¹¹¹John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 38.

¹¹²Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 51.

homocentric while it is more theocentric acknowledging the role of the creator God who has put the grammar of creation into all beings – human and non-human. One of the great contributions of *Caritas in Veritate* is its capacity to link together all life issues of environment, procreation, sexuality, biomedical developments, social justice, etc. in one grammar of creation.¹¹³ The dichotomy that exists between people who can be very attentive to ecological issues and callous to abortions, artificial reproduction, contraception, etc. or people who can be very conscious of problems associated with the latter but callous with regard to the care for the environment proceeds from a lack of understanding of the inter-connection of all these realities. The understanding that all things come as gifts from God and have to be treated with respect for the integrity of each can solve such dichotomy.

Respect for the order of creation and redemption, and concern for the basic needs of all can promote the right attitude to overcome the causes of ecological disasters. But such an attitude will flow only when a relationship with God is in place. As and when the relationship with God is placed aside, man and nature are both stripped of their profound meaning and are impoverished.¹¹⁴ In the same way, as nature is impoverished when the relationship of man with God is set aside, so also man suffers when he forgets the relationship with God (cf. Hos 4:3; Is 24:5).

With the identification of the root cause in ourselves, in the failure of ethics, in human moral degradation and not in the failure of policies or laws, the Church shows that it has something to offer beyond the faith-based versions of secular planning efforts. “To save people and the planet, we should be doing what we were supposed to be doing in Eden: loving God and neighbour, and tending to the garden that was given to us by God.”¹¹⁵

8.1. Call for a New Life-style

Since the way we treat ourselves and each other influences the way we treat the environment and vice versa, we need an inner change of

¹¹³Daniel Finn, “Economics of Charity,” *Commonweal* 136, 14 (14 August 2009) 9 as cited in David Cloutier, “Working with the Grammar of Creation: Benedict XVI, Wendell Berry, and the Unity of the Catholic Moral Vision,” *Communio* 37 (Winter 2010) 607.

¹¹⁴*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 487.

¹¹⁵William L. Patenaude, “The ‘Green Pope’ and a Human Ecology.” William Patenaude makes this conclusion at the end of commenting on the writings of Benedict XVI and Bishop Dominique Rey. Cf. Dominique Rey, *Catholicism, Ecology, and the Environment: A Bishop’s Reflection*, Christian Social Thought Series, Grand Rapids: Action Institute, 2014.

heart and mind — a conversion — that leads to change in life-style. We need to adopt a life-style guided by the divine design for creation in the way we view ourselves, one another and the environment.

This requires first of all *humility* to recognize the limits of human power, knowledge, and freedom. We need to recognize God as the Lord of creation and acknowledge that he has a design for each reality. The relationship of the creator God with human beings created in his image and with the environment that is entrusted to human care has to be recognized. This will stress universal solidarity, justice and responsibility to promote a true culture of life.¹¹⁶ This will also call us to detach ourselves from hedonism and consumerism to adopt a life-style marked by temperance and self-discipline at the individual and group levels.¹¹⁷

Hope is the second requirement. We must dare to hope that human beings of the present and future generations deserve a better, less polluted, less violent world — a world marked by generosity and love. With solidarity this is possible. Jesus feeding the multitude with five loaves and two fish is the example.¹¹⁸ At the end of the miracle we are told that all ate and were satisfied and they had twelve baskets full of leftover food showing that all people (12 tribes of Israel) can meet their needs and have extra if we live in solidarity. Christian hope calls us to commit to working responsibly for the protection of creation. Jesus tells the apostles “give them some food yourselves” (Mt 14:16).

Prayer will be the third requirement. We should pray the Creator God to enlighten men and women to care for the environment. The Catholic Church should become more aware of prayers that are already in its liturgy and make it an occasion for further reflection. The Cantic from Daniel prayed by the Church every Sunday recognizes the creator and calls on all creatures to join in praising and thanking God.¹¹⁹ The Church’s highest form of prayer, namely the celebration of the Holy Eucharist reminds each one of the attitude to be cultivated for a healthy ecological consciousness, namely to be grateful to God for creation and to acknowledge the internal order he has established.¹²⁰ At the presentation of the gifts, the prayer over the

¹¹⁶John Paul II & Bartholomew I, “Common Declaration on Environmental Ethics.”

¹¹⁷John Paul II, “Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace,” 13.

¹¹⁸Francis, General Audience 5 June 2013.

¹¹⁹Cf. Dan 3: 57-88, 56. This is the Cantic used in the Prayer of the Latin Church on 1st and 3rd Sunday. A shorter version Dan 3: 52-57 is used on 2nd and 4th Sunday.

¹²⁰Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* (February 22, 2007), AAS 99 (2007) 92; John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 48.

bread and wine acknowledges “fruit of the earth,” “fruit of the vine” and “work of human hands.”¹²¹ All human efforts and activity are offered to God while at the same time acknowledging the goodness of God through which we have received all things for our sustenance. The world as God’s creation is acknowledged. God is blessed for nature and human work that together bring forth the spiritual food. The world is not a simple raw material to be used as we wish. It is part of God’s plan in which all are called to be sons and daughters of God in Jesus Christ (cf. Eph 1:4-12). From the Garden of Eden to the end of days we are called to love God, to love our neighbour and to tend the garden entrusted to us.

9. Conclusion

This study has shown how the increased attention given by Moral Theology to ecological, environmental issues is an example of the ongoing renewal of Moral Theology after Vatican II. It follows the path proposed by the Council to show how the truths of revelation can illumine the problems that we face in our modern times. The identification of the ecological crisis as a moral problem, and the identification of human ecology as path to a solution rightly places the ecological problem in the context of the entire Christian faith and not as an isolated problem, which has nothing to do with faith. The much-anticipated publication of an encyclical on this theme can be expected to fan aflame the ongoing renewal efforts.

¹²¹Cf. *The Roman Missal*, trans. The International Commission on English in Liturgy, 3rd typical ed., Washington, DC: Catholic Book Publishing Corp, 2011, 381.