



*○ Lord, our Lord,
How glorious is your name over all the earth!
You have exalted your majesty above the heavens.
When I behold your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and stars which you set in place
What is man that you should be mindful of him
or the son of man that you should care for him?
You have made him little less than the angels,
and crowned him with glory and honor.
You have given him rule over the works of your hands,
putting all things under his feet.*

—PSALM 8:2; 4-7

ECOLOGY AND MORAL RESPONSIBILITY

Paul Pham
Professor Dr. Ron Large, Gonzaga University
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I. INTRODUCTION

The neglect and exploitation of the earth and its ecosystems, all being created by God and all being pronounced by Him to be “very good” (Genesis 1:31), is an ethical, religious, and theological issue of great importance. In examining its shortcomings in its responsibility of stewardship over the earth, Christian theology seeks to amend these failures and, moreover, foster a nourishing relationship with the earth over which man has been given dominion. Though ecology and moral responsibility in the Christian tradition is a topic of great breadth, this paper shall examine most closely (1) the exploitation of God’s creation; (2) the position as presented by the Biblical tradition and by the Church as well as the historical development of this position; and (3) the application of this position in the contemporary and its implications across religious and national boundaries.

II. THE ROLE OF HUMANITY IN THE STATE OF THE ENVIRONMENT

The Earth’s ecosystems are in steep decline, an issue which involves humanity both as an instigator and as a victim. It has become increasingly apparent that human activity, through the emissions of greenhouse gasses, has exacerbated the increase in average global temperature. Global warming and climate change has contributed to the rapid changes in global temperatures thus posing a threat to agricultural and ecological systems unable to adapt at an equal rate. The rise in temperatures has provoked extreme weather patterns which have cause large-scale devastation, often in the world’s most deprived areas. Melting the ice and glaciers at the poles and elsewhere, global warming has caused the rise of sea levels thus decreasing land mass and contributing to population density. Increasing the area in which pests and disease might thrive, climate change has aggravated their spread and encouraged their infestation. Biodiversity has been threatened as a result of climate change and invasive human activity; this leads to the irreversible loss of species through extinction and, subsequently, the irreversible loss of diversity. The disproportionate increase of carbon gases, once kept in balance by the ability of Earth’s vegetation to absorb carbon dioxide and release oxygen, has began to stifle Earth’s flora, thus threatening this delicate and fundamental equilibrium. Expansive industrialization has introduced contaminants into the environment causing instability, disorder, harm, and discomfort to both the ecosystems and its living organisms. The

contamination of our environments, the air we breathe, the water we drink, the soil from which we are fed, holds adverse effects on the health and indeed has caused the deaths of many living creatures, including humans.¹

In an attempt to identify and define the role of human activity in the degrading state of the environment, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the Nobel Peace Prize receiving scientific body commissioned by the United Nations, was tasked with the evaluation of the extent, risks, and causes of climate change. In the IPCC's most recent assessment in 2007, it was concluded that the "warming of the climate system is unequivocal;" that "most of the observed increase... is very likely (indicating a 90% likelihood) due to the... increase in anthropogenic (human) greenhouse gas concentrations;" and, most alarmingly, that "concentrations of carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide have increased markedly as a result of human activities..."²

It is the precarious state of the environment; its indisputable effects on all earthly creations, and the implication of humanity as well as its activities demonstrate an underlying lack of respect for life, thus poses a great moral challenge. What follows is the meticulous examination and awareness of the nature of our relationship with all of God's creation: our cultivation of and dependence on the lands, our responsibility and stewardship to the environment, what shall be left by us to our posterity, and what must be done in order to harmoniously subsist with His creation. Indeed Pope John Paul II, in *On Social Concern*, no. 34, speaks of this exacting role and responsibility in all of creation:

*"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. ...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."*³

This leaves our role in the natural world unambiguous: dominion, not as means to unbridled self-gratification, but rather as an ends in the care for and harmonious living amongst God's creation. There existed in Eden a finely balanced congruence between man and his environment; and as Adam and Eve have fallen out of such grace, so do we, their descendents, continue to upset this balance. We violate with impunity, as Pope John Paul II suggests, the moral laws to which we are subject in regards to our dominion over creation. As such, these environmental issues oblige our attention and summon our action.

III. ECOLOGICAL ISSUES: THE BIBLICAL TRADITION AND THE POSITION OF THE CHURCH

Ecological concern has been widely articulated through papal, conciliar, and episcopal documents both at the universal and regional levels. Additionally, Catholic Social Teaching recognizes and affirms the need to address these concerns as reflected by Sacred Scripture.

1. BIBLICAL TRADITION

Upon seeing all that He had created, God deemed Earth and all its inhabitants to be "very good." (Genesis 1:31). This, itself, is vital to the understanding of the way in which humanity must see the environment and its inhabitants. Though God created man in His own "divine image," and thus placed the human creature at the summit of the created order, God also blessed all other non-human creation, making clear that the material world, in itself, has value. Though not equal to man, nature may not be exploited by him. Humans cannot use of this world in manner which demean this value.

In creating man in His own image, God granted humanity dominion over all creation. Humans alone are tasked with authority over the material world and the obligation of exercising it in ways that allow His original Creative Act to be further revealed. In this way, humans, exercising their dominion, are tasked by God to be co-creators. In the parallel account of creation, God emphasizes the human responsibility of stewardship. Indeed, God tasks Adam to "tend and keep" (Genesis 2:15) the Garden of Eden. A caretaker cares for and keeps his charge in order that it may be returned to its owner in as good or a better condition than when it was tasked. Indeed, stewardship over the Earth calls not only for the great care in keeping His creation, but the cultivation of the environment and its inhabitants.

To Noah, God charges this same task after the Great Flood:

"So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move on the earth, and on all the fish of the sea. They are given into your hand." (Genesis 9:1-2)

Notably, in the story of Noah's Ark, it can be argued that God reveals great concern for the maintenance of biodiversity. By commanding that a pair of every species of fauna be saved, God tasks the keeping of the integrity of creation in order that it may be restored after the Flood.

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul offers the following:

“For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.” (Romans 8:19-22)

Saint Paul speaks of all creation being bound in grievous burden as a result of the sins of man. The corruption of humankind has subjected the ecosystems and all its living organisms to destruction and degradation. In his message, Paul tells of the earth and all its creatures anticipating expectantly the time when God and His sinless children should deliver creation from this bondage and enslavement.

2. GAUDIUM ET SPES, VATICAN II, 1965

Gaudium et Spes, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, one of the chief accomplishments of the Second Vatican Council, signals a pastoral and methodological shift in the approach of the Church to the modern world. It articulates the responsibility of the Church to closely survey the “signs of the times” and interpret them in accordance with the Gospel. In this way, the Church, “in a language intelligible to each generation,” can best adapt to and address the perennial issues which face humanity. Therefore, in its responsibility in examining and responding to the contemporary world, the modern Church, in accordance with its task as charged by *Gaudium et Spes*, must examine and respond to the mounting ecological crisis.⁴

Additionally, *Gaudium et Spes* asserts that man, as a social being by his “innermost nature”, must relate himself to others or forfeit his potential in the primary form of “interpersonal communion.” Extending the consideration that humans must actively participate in their community, Russell Butkus and Steven Kolmes suggest that as creatures of the earth and as ecological beings, man must also relate himself well to the earth or forfeit his development.⁵

3. OCTOGESIMA ADVENIENS, POPE PAUL VI, 1971

In 1971, Pope Paul VI, in his apostolic letter, prompts the awareness of and the continuation of the teachings of the Church in addressing the contemporary needs of a changing world. “The Church,” he

extends, "... travels forward with humanity and shares its lot in the setting of history." In aiding humanity to "correspond to God's plan of love" and to encourage humanity to "realize the fullness of their aspirations," the Church must clarify the activities of humanity in accordance with the Gospel.⁶

With specific regard to the environment, Pope Paul VI, addresses "the dramatic and unexpected consequence of human activity" on the environment. The "ill-considered exploitation of nature" by humanity puts at risk the destruction of nature and, thus, turning humanity itself into "the victim of this degradation." Describing the material world as "a permanent menace" which may create an intolerable future, Pope Paul VI tasks Christians to take notice of these changing perceptions and take responsibility together with all mankind in addressing a shared destiny. Indeed, a responsible relationship with the environment is, as asserted by Pope Paul VI, a "wide-ranging social problem which concerns the entire human family."⁷

4. SOLLICITUDO REI SOCIALIS, POPE JOHN PAUL II, 1987

In his 1987 letter addressed to the "sons and daughters of the Church and all people of good will," Pope John Paul II identifies the responsibility of the Church to lead people to respond, with a proper engagement to "rational reflection" and the natural sciences, to "their vocation as responsible builders of earthly society." Continuing in accordance with his predecessors, Pope John Paul II seeks to reaffirm the continuity and constant renewal of the social doctrine. Though ever constant in its "fundamental inspiration" in its "vital link with the Gospel," the social teaching of the Church, he continues, is subject to the "necessary and opportune adaptations" of the changes in conditions, and continual course of events in which the lives of people and society is set. Through a theological investigation of the contemporary setting, Pope John Paul II intends to provide a more complete concept of development and, moreover, to put these conceptions into effect.⁸

Ecological concern, as addressed in his letter, is the respect for the integrity of nature and taking into account this respect when planning for development. Pope John Paul II calls for a threefold consideration which reflects carefully upon the development of the moral character which also, in its constitution, respects all beings of the natural world. The first is the consideration that humans must not irresponsibly use with impunity any category of being. It is necessary, rather, to be aware of and act according to this awareness that each being has a mutual connection in the ordered system of creation. The second consideration is responsible action in accordance with the awareness that natural resources are limited and, moreover, that

some resources are not renewable. The negligent use of these resources is a precarious and irresponsible deed with not only contemporaneous implications, but eventual implications which affect our posterity as well. A true moral concept of development, Pope John Paul II indicates, cannot ignore the “consciences to the moral dimension of development.”⁹

5. PEACE WITH GOD THE CREATOR, PEACE WITH ALL OF CREATION, POPE JOHN PAUL II, 1990

In 1990, Pope John Paul II indicates that world peace is threatened not only by conflict but also by a lack of due respect for nature, by negligent human activity with regards to the environment, and by the consequent decline in the quality of life. Underlying the ecological problem, Pope John Paul II asserts, is the lack of respect for life. This irresponsible approach is evident in the ways in which economic interests supersede concerns for the dignity and the good of individuals both directly and by way of environmental degradation. Pollution and environmental destruction is, according to Pope John Paul II, “the result of an unnatural and reductionist vision which at times leads to a genuine contempt for man.”¹⁰

To address this, Pope John Paul II, in accordance with the Catholic social teaching regarding global solidarity and universal human familiarity, directs for a new solidarity among humanity. He extols the virtue of solidarity in its demonstration of a resolute determination and commitment to the common good because, he indicates, “we are all really responsible for all.” In response to the ecological crisis, it is essential that a relationship of shared responsibility must be established amongst both developed nations and those that are industrialized. This responsibility is essential to promote a natural and social environment that sustains both global peace and health.¹¹

The education of ecological responsibility is a fundamental factor in this shared responsibility. In defining this education, Pope John Paul II asserts that it “cannot be rooted in mere sentiment or empty wishes,” nor can it be “ideological or political.” It must not be a “rejection of the modern world or a vague desire to return to some ‘paradise lost.’” Rather, a “true education” must be embedded in the “genuine conversion” of perspective and action. Specifically calling upon “churches and religious bodies, non-governmental and governmental organization, indeed all members of society,” Pope John Paul II identifies their exacting roles in such education. Primarily, however, this education must begin within the family, where children are taught to respect their neighbors and, indeed, to love nature.¹²

6. CENTESIMUS ANNUS, POPE JOHN PAUL II, 1991

In an encyclical written in 1991, Pope John Paul II, refers to the close connection between the ecological question and the problem of consumerism. The “senseless destruction” of the environment is rooted in this anthropological error: in the human desire “to have and to enjoy” rather than “to be and to grow,” humanity consumes, in an “excessive and disordered” rate, the resources of the earth. ¹³

To limit the waste of environmental and human resources and to protect the environment, Pope John Paul II calls for changes on the state- and consumer-levels. He tasks the state with the provision of the defense and preservation of common goods, namely natural and human environments, which cannot be maintained by market forces alone. He tasks consumers, and indeed all of society, with a change in lifestyles; so that environmental and human resources might not be wasted; in order that all the peoples of the world, both contemporaneously and eventual, will have a sufficient share of those resources.¹⁴

In response, the Church in the United States has responded with the expansion of Catholic Social Thought. Episcopal letters and statements have been issued including *Strangers and Guests* (Catholic bishops of twelve Midwestern states, 1984), *Economic Justice for All* (USCCB, 1986), *Renewing the Earth* (USCCB, 1991), *The Columbia River Watershed* (Catholic Bishops on the Region, 2001), and *Global Climate Change*, (USCCB, 2001). These significant documents represent an initial raid into the conscience and seriousness of climate change and the implications of applying Catholic Social Teaching to this global phenomenon.

7. THE ECONOMIC JUSTICE FOR ALL, USCCB, 1986

In a pastoral letter promulgated by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in 1986, we are called to use “the resources of our faith”, the strength of our economy, and the opportunities of democracy in shaping a society wherein the dignity and basic rights of the human family may be better protected. Among the many challenges in doing so, the Bishops identify the issue of deleting natural resources.¹⁵

Created by God for the benefit of all, the resources of the earth are held by humanity in trust. This common ecological environment, shared by all people, faces the depletion of its natural resources and the

continual threat to the delicate balance of the biosphere. As such, we endanger the future of the environment upon which later generations will depend. The challenge, then, is to cultivate an ecological ethic which ensures a just and sustainable future and, moreover, uphold this trust.

Though its stewardship and trust is assigned to all humanity, as to contribute to the common good in solidarity, the Bishops mention particularly the role of businesses and agriculture and, additionally, the role towards the impoverished. By assessing their impact on the depletion of natural resources and the pollution caused by their activity, businesses conduct themselves responsibly as not to violate their duty as faithful trustees of the resources at their disposal. Farmers, who subsist in part from the use of the environment, bear a “particular obligation to be caring stewards” of this “endowment.” This is done by participating in conservation programs, using sustainable farming practices, and maintaining efficient use of their farmland. The irresponsible use of natural resources and the aggravation of further ecological degradation fall most heavily upon the poor. The Bishops call for common action in the stewardship and service especially towards the poor and the vulnerable who often do not have the resources to adapt to or ward off the impacts of climate change.¹⁶

8. RENEWING THE EARTH, USCCB, 1991

Intending to contribute the existing ecological dialogue both in the nation and the Church, the USCCB, in a 1991 pastoral statement, highlights the ethical dimensions of environmental issues; explores the relationships between ecology and poverty, environment and development; promote a just and sustainable world community; encourages all men and women of good will to reflect on the religious dimensions of these issues; and begins to explore the potential contribution of the Church to environmental questions.

In the tradition of Catholic Social Teaching, the Bishops find the following to be integral to environmental ethics: a “God-centered and sacramental view of the universe,” thus grounding human responsibility for the future of the earth; a “consistent respect for human life, which extends to respect for all creation;” a world perspective which affirms the ethical significance of interdependence and the common good; “an ethics of solidarity” which promotes cooperation and a just structure of sharing within the world community; an understanding of “the universal purpose of created things, which requires equitable use of the

earth's resources;" a care for the poor, and a conception of "authentic development" which offers direction for a progress that respects human dignity and limitations on material growth.¹⁷

The ecological crisis demands, the Bishops asserts, "concerted and creative thought and effort on the part of all." Whereas the environmental movement laudably affirms the devotion to nature, the recognition of limitations and connections, and the appeal for sustainable and ecologically sound policies; the Bishops emphasize the need to attend the moral and ethical dimensions of these issues. Together, in solidarity, there is "considerable common ground in the concern for the earth," and there is, the Bishops contend, "much work to do" as a community of stewards.¹⁸

Stewardship implies a concurrent care for creation according to universal standards with a creative spirit in finding ways to make the earth flourish. This difficult balance requires both a "sense of limits and a spirit of experimentation." Such a task, the Bishops suggest, is "unprecedented, intricate, complex," and in order to "live in balance with the finite resources of the planet, we need an unfamiliar blend of restraint and innovation," which shall require both new attitudes and new actions. Not only the recognition of our current shortcomings in the care for our environment, the Bishops call for the virtues of prudence, humility, and temperance in addition to faith, hope, and love in order to sustain and direct our response to the environmental crisis. The Bishops call also for an increase in the exploration of both the scientific and ethical dimensions of the issues, a responsible education of all in the Catholic tradition of caring for the earth, and a deep reexamine of societal actions and the changes necessary to convert these actions to coincide with the responsible use of and care for the environment.¹⁹

9. THE COLUMBIA RIVER WATERSHED, 2001

The bishops of the Archdioceses of the Northwestern states and Nelsen, Canada issued, on January 8, 2001, a regional pastoral statement, *The Columbia River Watershed: Caring for Creation and the Common Good*. Establishing a consultation process with scholars and scientists over a three year period, the bishops listened to community leaders and representatives of interested organizations in many communities along the watershed, an important component of the ecological system. The present pattern of agriculture and development is unusually unaware of the current state of water supplies. That watersheds, a real entity, are ignored is disconcerting and contributes to the expression that "water will be the next oil."²⁰

In the letter, the bishops define stewardship as the role of the people in relation to creation as the goods of the earth are gifts from God, intended for the benefit of all. As caretakers for His creation, stewards of the earth are called to “use wisely” and “distribute justly” the goods of His earth in order to meet the needs of His creation. As such, each individual of the human family is called to respect creation, and therefore the Creator, and be responsible for that part of the earth entrusted to their stewardship.

Of particular concern to the bishops is the development of consumerism and its threat to our responsibility in stewardship. As people become more entrenched in material goods and less conscious of spiritual and social relationships, consumerism has supplanted compassion and the exploitation of the earth has supplanted stewardship. “There is a need,” the bishops urge, “for a spiritual conversion to a better and deeper sense of stewardship for God’s creation and responsibility for our communities.”²¹

The bishops also address the impact and role of businesses and their industrial operations with regards to good stewardship. Though often providing jobs and funding schools, the wastes produced by their activity leave the land and waters polluted. In the watershed, there exist huge sites for cleanup and environmentally hazardous working conditions. There are, however, industrial operations which stand as paradigms of responsible industrialization and production, exemplifying a proper stewardship of the watershed.²²

Underlying their discussion is the theme of respect. Industry and consumers alike must respect people and nature and be sensitive to their impact on the common good. People must use a basic ethic of respect for others, for God, for other creatures, and for the environment. Individuals need also to respect the rights of others including those engaged in industrial activity. Envisioning an increased exercise of respect, the bishops call for measures of ecological efficiency, recycling, cleaner emissions and effluents; they urge the development of international and intergenerational consciousness of and respect for the needs of the environment.

Addressed to the Catholic community and to all people of good will, the bishops seek to develop and implement an integrated spiritual, social, and ecological vision for the Columbia watershed, a vision which promotes justice for humanity and stewardship of creation. The letter links the common good with habitat, community, and the ecological region emphasizing the integration and interrelatedness of these domains of human and non-human habitation. This unique international endeavor among bishops and Catholics in the region has helped raise an ethical concern for the future use of the Columbia River.²³

IV. ECOLOGICAL APPLICATION OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

In its approach to the modern world and its many questions, including climate change, the Church conveys a tradition of applying Catholic Social Teachings to these complex issues. Rooted in Scripture and the tradition of the Church, Catholic Social Teaching is mechanism for evangelization; it expresses the social doctrine of the Church outlining ethical principles to guide the development of a morally just society. Such principles are particularly pertinent to the many challenging social, political, economic and ecological issues of the modern world. Catholic Social Teaching extols three themes that apply particularly to the concern for the environment. First, Catholic Social Teaching calls for the respect of human life and dignity. Second, as the world becomes increasingly interdependent, we must grow further the common good and the virtue of solidarity. Thirdly, there is a particular responsibility to the poor and vulnerable, who may be the least able to cope with the changes in the environment. Their lives, homes, children and work are most at risk. Ironically, they contribute least to the problems of global climate change but bear the greatest burdens because they have the least capacity to escape. We need to share an abiding love for God's gift of creation and moral responsibility to care for God's creation both human and nature. Our response to the ecological crisis is indicative of our respect for God's creation and a measure of our faith and stewardship. This global environmental predicament concerns the one human family. It concerns the poor and the vulnerable and those generations yet to come. The representation of the poor and vulnerable is often absent in the debates and decisions regarding the response to the ecological problem. We must encourage public officials to help "ensure those voices are heard, their needs addressed, and their burdens eased."²⁴

1. ADVOCATING ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE POLICIES

Following the leadership of the Church, it is appropriate that Christians take interest in and responsibility for the modern ecological problems. Insofar as the common good is recognized beyond Catholic circles, or is implicit in other kinds of arguments, it may also offer a standard by which governmental policy with particular concern to the environment can be assessed. In regards to global equity, public authorities hold a particular responsibility to the common good. In accordance with Catholic tradition, the promotion and defense of the common good is to be the fundamental task of all public officials. There is a stark indifference in the rich nations towards the poor which is apparent in attitudes towards policies

concerning global climate change. Developing nations are experiencing the most severe though their relatively low outputs of pollution and resource consumption; the disproportionate consequences of climate change is far greater degree than developed nations who consume the most resources and produce the most pollution. The Bush administration has objected that under the Kyoto Convention, rapidly developing countries of significant size, such as China and India, will not participate in first-stage reduction requirements. At present, however, China, with a population of 1.2 billion, accounts for 11% of the total greenhouse emissions as compared to the 25% for which the United States with its population of 280 million is responsible. Per capita the Chinese are four to five times as populous as the United States, yet are responsible for a small amount of the production of greenhouse gases for which the United States is responsible. Morality itself demands that the industrialized nations such as the United States make conscious efforts for the sake of and in the promotion of the planetary common good. Moral integrity demands that the United States accept responsibility for its disproportionate role in contributing to global warming. Moral accountability before the world community demands that we in the United States take direct responsibility for cleaning up the global nest we have so amply polluted.²⁵ The United States hopefully under the new administration would construct a policy of responsibility, beginning with efforts at compliance with the existing international agreements such as the Kyoto Treaty. The teaching of the Church on the issue of global climate suggests that industrialized countries must demonstrate global responsibility and show fairness to poor countries.

Though they may assist less industrialized countries to develop, it is preferential, in the context of global climate change, to favor policies that attempt to mitigate greenhouse gases, both current and forthcoming. In addition to the reduction of greenhouse gases, it is incumbent on industrialized nations to the amelioration and the prevention of the expected destructive impact of global warming on poor regions of the world. This is, accordingly, an expense against notions of the primacy of national interest, narrowly conceived, in favor of humanity. Countries located in coastal regions and island states are in need of special attention from collaborative international forces; these coastal countries are victim of some of the greatest effects of the climate change with the least means to escape as they attempt to retain not only their land but also their culture, tradition and ancestral homes held for many generations. ²⁶

Our environment is gift granted to all humanity and this “common good” is not only for the enjoyment and usage in today’s generations, but for future generations to flourish and to tend to. Thus, it is faulty for

public authorities and corporations to trade rights over the environment as a trading unit with intrinsic worth because the environment is a source of great natural wealth for all, present and future. As tenders of the environment in the present day, we are faced with an active consciousness of the need to sustain the environment, leaving it in a good or better condition for generations to come. In turn, this will set an example and precedents for future generations to be proper caretakers of the limited resources we are granted within our environment. In conclusion, it is the duty of all to be careful stewards of the environment. Whether it is public authorities legislating responsible practices or the student choosing to ride his or her bike as opposed to driving, we, as part of today's population, are responsible to the future generation.²⁷

2. APPLICATIONS CROSSING RELIGIONS AND NATIONAL BOUNDARIES

"Caring for the environment is a challenge for all of humanity. It is a matter of a common and universal duty, that of respecting the common good."²⁸ But another reason demanding respect and responsibility over the environment is called from our faith. "It is a responsibility that must mature on a basis of the global dimension of the present ecological crisis and the consequent necessity to meet it on a worldwide level, since all beings are interdependent in the universal order established by the Creator."²⁹ This responsibility reaches to each individual as each and every of God's creatures depends upon one Earth, one environment and one set of resources. These resources are subject to abuse and extinction if we fail to recognize the complex nature of God's mysterious creation³⁰. Thus, the major faith traditions of the world all recognize the restoration of the Earth as a fundamental set of ethics. In a companion document for the UN Agenda 21 adopted at the Earth Summit, Bahai, Buddhist, Christian, Islamic, Jewish, and native writers all share their perspective on ethics to care for and restore the Earth.³¹ A precedent was set in faith-based responsibility when the Orthodox ecumenical patriarch Bartholomew declared pollution a sin against God. This movement was extended when Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople signed the Declaration on the Environment, "We Are Still Betraying the Mandate God Has Given Us." Buddhist tradition, the fourteenth Dalai Lama, addresses environmental issues: "The problems of the environment cross all national boundaries in a way that no nation can afford to ignore, thus bringing about an opportunity for international cooperation."³² These actions set a model for ecumenical movement, whose members began to actively seek and advocate both environmentally and socially responsible policies.

3. CHANGES IN LIFESTYLE:

Global Climate Change demands changes in lifestyle as the U.S. Bishops stated:

True stewardship requires changes in human actions - both in moral behavior and technical advancement. ...Changes in lifestyle based on traditional moral virtues can ease the way to a sustainable and equitable world economy in which sacrifice will no longer be an unpopular concept....A renewed sense of sacrifice and restraint could make an essential contribution to addressing global climate change.³³

No matter the changes made by corporations and public authorities, without the effort of each individual, the movement to be responsible shepherds of the Earth is futile. This ideal is not met without challenges. As standards of living rise, populations increase and more countries develop, personal sacrifice as an idea is challenged and forgotten in the gleam of human development.³⁴ For humans, no matter than nationality, it is easier to leave the job of responsible environment practices to others – other people, other countries or even other generations. If we are to deal realistically and responsibly with our global situation, we need both spiritual deepening and a renewed sense of hope. This hope must not be retained within races or borders, but must spread to all people as we all are responsible. Hence, we need a vision of a possible hopeful future for the planet even if we cannot avoid all catastrophes. The New Testament image of hope is the Kingdom of God; throughout Christian history a great variety of meanings have been read into that image.

One interpretation of this vision includes long-term sustainable development to reduce and eventually solve the global climate change. This requires a vast pursuit of alternate technology and methods to develop efficient and clean power.³⁵ Already in development in concurrent with this vision is wind, solar and hydro power – sustainable power without the use of petroleum leaving both the environment and the energy economy stable. Furthermore, scientifically based practical advice about how to help overcome global climate change is available including Clean Energy Economy, Adoption of Renewables, Enhanced Energy Efficiency and so on.

By the means of the Catholic Doctrine, population would be limited by individual choices as opposed to pestilence, war, and famine. This population would be relatively stable as a sense of jointly moving into a more fulfilling future, and promote solidarity - the practical affirmation of the individual to work in concurrent with the vision of good for society. With respect to climate change, solidarity entails: (1) the

international collaboration of many countries to confront the problems of climate change in a unified effort, (2) the adoption and implementation of technical mechanisms to monitor and alter the economy, pollution and the environment, such as the Kyoto Convention; (3) as a matter of equity, public authorities work to relieve the cost of defeating climate change for poorer nations, and (4) it urge the exploration of programs of abatement consistent with further socio-economic development of poor nations.³⁶

The rhetorical questions are, at this juncture, are we ready even provisionally to begin to describe for ourselves the shape of a hopeful future toward which our efforts may be rightly directed? If so, at what points does it support the fragmented concerns for ecological justice, and the environment that guide most of our actions? At what points does it redirect our energies?

V. CONCLUSION

We stand at an ecological crossroads where critical choices must be made. Those choices are at heart religious as we are called for a deeper respect for God's creation and engage in activities to protect the environment, promote sustainable communities and preserve the sanctity of creation. The decisions we make will decisively shape the quality of life for ourselves and generations to come.³⁷ As Christians, we need to open our hearts through scripture, tradition, prayer, theology and liturgy, and open our minds to learn and teach the issues among us and then open our hands to implement projects in the hope to restore the planet.

Prayer of Confession: O God, in whom we trust, you have created the world good, and made each of us equally in your image. Yet, we failed to meet our Earth-keeping vocation. Ignoring your commandments, we violate the image of God in others and ourselves, exploit neighbor and nature, and threaten death to the planet entrusted to our care. We deserve condemnation. Yet you act with justice and mercy to redeem creation. Reconcile us from sin, we pray, and set us free to serve the Earth community. Amen. ³⁸

END NOTES:

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- ¹ Anup Shah, “*Climate Change and Global Warming*,” <http://www.globalissues.org>, (March 3, 2016).
- ² *The Working Group Summary for Policymakers*, “Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change,” <http://www.UN.org>, (March 3, 2016).
- ³ *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 30 December 1987, “On Social Concern,” *The Twentieth Anniversary of Populorum Progressio. Encyclical*. John Paul II. Vatican Web Site. The Holy See. 01-Sep-08.
- ⁴ *Gaudium Et Spes*. December 7, 1965. Pastoral Constitution on The Church in The Modern World Promulgated by His Holiness. Pope Paul VI. Vatican Web Site. The Holy See. 02-Sept-08.
- ⁵ Russell A. Butkus and Steven A. Kolmes, “Global Climate Change,” (Paper Presented at Villanova University November 10-11, 2005).
- ⁶ Octogesima Adveniens. 14 May 1971. Apostolic Letter. Pope Paul VI. Vatican Web Site. The Holy See. 05-Sept-08.
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*. December 30, 1987. On Social Concern. John Paul II. Vatican Web Site. The Holy See. 02-Sept-08.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ Peace With God The Creator, Peace With All of Creation. 1 January 1990. For The Celebration of The World Day of Peace. John Paul II. Vatican Web Site. The Holy See. 05-Sept-08.
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ *Centesimus Annus*. 05 January 1991. On The Hundredth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum. John Paul II. Vatican Web Site. The Holy See. 05-Sept-08.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ USCCB, “Economic Justice For All”, <http://www.Osjspm.Org/Economic_Justice_For_All.Aspx> (September 02, 2008).
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ USCCB, “Renewing The Earth”, <<http://www.UscCb.Org/Sdwp/Ejp/Bishopsstatement.Shtml>> (September 06, 2008).
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ Ibid.
- ²⁰ Russell A. Butkus , Steven A. Kolmes, “Ecology and The Common Good: Sustainability and Catholic Social Teaching” (Paper Presented At Villanova University November 10-11, 2005).
- ²¹ Catholic Bishops of the Region, “The Columbia River Watershed: Caring For Creation and The Common Good An International Pastoral Letter,” <Http://www.TheWscC.Org/Files/Pastoral-English.Pdf>

(September 03, 2008).

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ USCCB, "Poor and Vulnerable will Suffer Most From Inaction and Neglect on Climate Change, Says USCCB Official," <http://www.UscCb.Org/Comm/Archives/07-101.Shtml> (September 06, 2008).

²⁵ Drew Christiansen, S.J., "The Common Good and Leadership Among Nations, A Roman Catholic Theological Perspective on Equity and Global Climate Change," (Paper Presented at Woodstock Theological Center for The Pew Center on Global Climate Change, September 17-18, 2001).

²⁶ Christiansen, S.J., "The Common Good and Leadership Among Nations, A Roman Catholic Theological Perspective on Equity and Global Climate Change."

²⁷ USCCB, "The Common Good and The Catholic Church's Social Teaching ", <<http://www.UscCb.Org/Sdwp/Ejp/Bishopsstatement.Shtml>> (September 06, 2008).

²⁸ Compendium of The Social Doctrine of The Church. 2004. #466 Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. Vatican Web Site. The Holy See. September 15, 2008. <http://www.Vatican.Va/Roman_Curia/Pontifical_Councils/Justpeace/Documents/Rc_Pc_Justpeace_Doc_20060526_CompndioDottsoc_En.Html#Responsibility%20of%20everyone%20for%20the%20common%20good>.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ USCCB, "*Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and The Common Good*," (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2001), 8.

³¹ Dieter T Hesse, "*Becoming a Church for Ecology and Justice*," in the Prophetic Call, Celebrating Community, Earth, Justice, and Peace, Ed. Hugh Sanborn, (Denvers, MA: Chalice Press,2004), 85.

³² Ibid.

³³ USCCB, "Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and The Common Good", <<Http://www.UscCb.Org/Sdwp/International/Globalclimate.Shtml> > (September 06, 2008).

³⁴ Christiansen, S.J., "The Common Good and Leadership among Nations, A Roman Catholic Theological Perspective on Equity and Global Climate Change."

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Cynthia Bowman, "*Issues of Injustice in the Church and Society*," in the Prophetic Call, Celebrating Community, Earth, Justice, and Peace, Ed. Hugh Sanborn, (Denvers, MA: Chalice Press, 2004), 127

³⁸ Hesse, "*A Prophetic Vision of Restoring the Earth*," in the Prophetic Call, Celebrating Community, Earth, Justice, and Peace, Ed. Hugh Sanborn, 96.

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