



Joining in the Dance: Catholic Social Teaching and Ecology

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Abstract

This paper charts the emergence of environmental themes in Roman Catholic Social Teaching (CST). I argue that not only has this strand not been adequately acknowledged, but also that the theological basis for these ideas are rooted in core Roman Catholic teachings on creation, Christology and anthropology. In other words, concern for environmental issues is not an optional extra for Christian practice, but expresses in a fundamental way deep incarnation and human image-bearing as responsible stewardship. I argue that a particular concern with issues of social justice shapes the way environmental problems are addressed, so terms such as human ecology, ecological conversion, solidarity, the common good and world peace all take up ecological threads that are then woven into the account. While Pope John Paul II arguably laid the foundation for the theological bases for these ideas, Pope Benedict XVI applies these ideas more explicitly to current concerns. Yet while the former gave witness to the power of contemplation of the natural world, the latter is more concerned with distortions in philosophical reasoning in the Western world, including dangers he perceived in naturalism and pantheism. Both pontiffs show a lack of specific understanding of ecological systems and tend to idealise both nature in terms of harmonious relationships and humans in terms of mastery.

Keywords

Catholic Social Teaching, ecology, deep incarnation, ecological conversion, solidarity

The Emergence of CST and Ecology

Although Roman Catholic Social Teaching (CST) is sometimes interpreted to mean the combination of official Catholic teaching with

lay theological reflection,¹ for the purposes of this paper and in order to limit its scope to reasonable proportions I am interpreting CST as that which represents the official social teaching of the Church. This official social teaching may be rooted in theology and biblical reflection, but its essence is that it emanates from the official hierarchical Magisterium.² It may, therefore come as something of a surprise to find that this official CST has concerned itself with ecology as far back as 1971, just at the time when a field of theological reflection loosely known as ecotheology had started to emerge among lay theologians. While it is hard to give the latter a date, the seminal writing *Silent Spring* by biologist Rachel Carson on pollution in 1962,³ as well as the analysis of Christianity as at least partly causative of the ecological crisis by historian Lynn White in the magazine *Science* in 1967, spawned a host of reactions among (mostly) Protestant writers from the 1970s onwards wishing to expunge the blame attributed to Christian religion.⁴ How far this defensiveness is justified depends on how one might interpret the command in Genesis to ‘have dominion over the earth’ in exploitative terms. Historically, at least, some Christian interpreters have used the Genesis text as a licence for subsequent exploitation, even if biblical exegetes quake at the validity of such a reading.⁵

¹ This interpretation has been argued for in pedagogical texts by the Jesuit educationalist and theologian Peter Henriot working from a Zambian context. He claims that CST is broader than that found in official church statements, rather, for him Roman Catholic social teaching as ‘the best kept secret’ reflects the wisdom of the community. In ‘Why Do We Have the Church’s Social Teaching?’, <http://www.jctr.org.zm/publications/whycst.htm> accessed 3 August 2011, he writes ‘We can find this social wisdom in the scripture, in the writings of theologians, in the statements coming from our church leaders and in the witness of the lives of good Christians’. He presented similar ideas to a CAFOD study day in London on 16 March 2010.

² See, for example, a definition by the office of social justice for St Paul and Minneapolis, where, ‘Modern Catholic social teaching is the body of social principles and moral teaching that is articulated in the papal, conciliar, and other official documents issued since the late nineteenth century and dealing with the economic, political, and social order. This teaching is rooted in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures as well as in traditional philosophical and theological teachings of the Church’, see http://www.osjspm.org/social_teaching_documents.aspx, accessed 3 August 2011. The difference between this view and that of Henriot mirrors to some extent a debate about the difference between the official Magisterium and the magisterium. See Gerard Mannion, Richard Gaillardetz, Jan Kerkhofs and Kenneth Wilson, eds., *Readings in Church Authority: Gifts and Challenges for Contemporary Catholicism* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

³ Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962)

⁴ Lynn White, ‘The Historic Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis’, *Science*, 155 (3767) (1967) pp. 1203–1207.

⁵ Peter Harrison, for example, notes that the exploitative strand in the interpretation of dominion as domination was evident in some Calvinist groups. See Peter Harrison, ‘Having Dominion: Genesis and the Mastery of Nature’ in *Environmental Stewardship: Critical Perspectives – Past and Present*, Berry, R.J. (ed) (London: T & T Clark International, 2006), pp. 17–30.

In searching back for the first inklings of environmental⁶ awareness in CST⁷, perhaps the best place to look first is the writing of Pope Paul VI and his Apostolic Letter of 14 May 1971, *Octogesima Adveniens*, dedicated to the 80th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*.⁸ While the main point of this letter is directed to social problems of urbanisation and the social justices that emerge in this context, there is a short section on environmental issues in §21, described as ‘the dramatic and unexpected consequence of human activity’, which amounts to an ‘ill considered exploitation of nature’. Most significant of all is that this is not of marginal concern; rather, human activity leads to the risk of destroying the natural world as well as human beings becoming ‘the victim of this degradation’, so that ‘the human framework is no longer under man’s control’. What seems to be recognised here is not just the dangers of environmental destruction, and the ultimate consequences for humanity, but the shared responsibility to do something about it. At this stage there is little concrete suggestion as to what actions that improve environmental responsibility might entail, or the theological basis of this concern.

In the same year (1971), however, the World Synod of Catholic Bishops’ meeting in Rome produced a statement entitled *Justitia in Mundo* where the blame for environmental degradation is laid firmly at the feet of the richer nations of the world, both capitalist and socialist.⁹ They called for the acceptance by the richer nations of a simpler life, with less waste, in order to avoid the destruction of the earth, seen as a common heritage for all members of the human race.¹⁰ Romans 8 is also cited here as a way of reinforcing the suffering of creation and the vocation of Christians to bring about a better world, reflecting the fullness of creation.¹¹

⁶ I am using ecology and environment somewhat interchangeably, though there are of course some distinctions in definition in that environmental issues are often even broader than ecological ones. For a discussion of the nature of the difference and commonality, see C. Deane-Drummond, ‘Theology and the Environmental Sciences’, in *Christianity and the Disciplines: The Transformation of the University*, in Oliver Crisp, Mervyn Davies, Gavin D’Costa, Peter Hampson, eds., London: T&T Clark, Continuum, 2012.

⁷ I am grateful to Helen Connor for some assistance in the preliminary work needed in helping to identify the resources within CST that included discussion of environmental issues.

⁸ Pope Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens* http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_letters/documents/hf_p-vi_apl_19710514_octogesima-adveniens_en.html, accessed 11 April 2011. There are other sources that could be bracketed under CST on environmental issues, but I have largely confined my attention to the pontiffs.

⁹ World Synod of Catholic Bishops in Australia, *Justitia in Mundo*, §11, http://catholicsocialservices.org.au/Catholic_Social_Teaching/Justitia_in_Mundo, accessed 4 August, 2011.

¹⁰ *Justitia in Mundo*, § 70

¹¹ *Justitia in Mundo*, §75, 77.

Pope John Paul II's Emerging Theological Mandate for Environmental Concern

But the credit for laying a firmer theological foundation for environmental concern in CST must be given to Pope John Paul II who, from the very first encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, written in 1979, showed an acute awareness of its importance. Early on in this text he takes the profound step of linking the original creation narrative in Genesis with the incarnation of Jesus Christ, so that Christ acts to restore not simply broken humanity, but a broken earth as well. So, 'In Jesus Christ the visible world which God created for man – the world that, when sin entered, "was subject to futility" – recovers again its original link with the divine source of Wisdom and Love.'¹² He also, like *Justitia in Mundo*, cites Romans 8 as an example of creation groaning, linking it to the suffering of the natural world, but now adding the idea that the subjection to futility is a reflection of humanity's action in bringing about that futility.¹³

Bringing together the groaning of creation in Romans 8 with human exploitation of the earth is not unusual among ecotheologians, but it might come as a surprise to find a pontiff's explicit endorsement.¹⁴ However, what is even more surprising is the way that Pope John Paul II explicitly marks up this area of social concern as one which betrays a *Christological mandate* to restore not just a broken humanity, in all its social dimensions, but a broken natural world as well. It reflects, in other words, what might be termed a cosmic Christology, or what some contemporary theologians have termed, deep incarnation.¹⁵ But what is particularly significant in the way

¹² Pope John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, §8. http://www.vatican.va/edocs/ENG0218/_INDEX.HTM, accessed 13 April 2011.

¹³ I should add that biblical exegetes normally equate *God* as the subject in this text, rather than humanity, so, creation as subject to futility implies that creation cannot achieve the original purpose intended for it in Genesis. The *agent* in the Genesis text is God, so that its subjection in Romans 8 is more likely to be through the agency of God, even if Adam was the cause in the sense of deserving the punishment. B. Byrne, 'An Ecological Reading of Rom 8. 19–23', in David Horrell, David G. Horrell, Cheryl Hunt, Christopher Southgate, and Francesca Stavrakopoulou, eds. *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives*, (London: T & T Clark/Continuum, 2010) p. 87; (83–93).

¹⁴ There is a certain intellectual snobbery among some academic theologians that disparages theological reflection on matters of practical concern and environmental ethics in particular, stemming perhaps from a misplaced assumption that it is all tainted with a pantheistic brush, or somehow diluted by its contact with scientific reasoning, or simply emerging from the 'signs of the times' and popular perceptions of what is 'relevant'. While all of these criticisms may be valid in some cases, the mistake is to assume that a field as a whole is necessarily falling into these traps.

¹⁵ Noted contemporary Catholic writers who develop a more explicit ecotheology which draws on traditional sources include, for example, Denis Edwards, such as his *Ecology at the Heart of Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2006) and Elisabeth Johnson, *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* (New York: Continuum, 2007);

that Pope John Paul II refers to this futility is the cross-linking between different aspects of social devastation, ranging from destruction of the natural environment, through to nuclear war, and lack of respect for the life of the unborn, alongside the unbridled use of new technologies.¹⁶ Ecology perceived as an aspect of other social injustices perhaps marks out the distinctive contribution of CST to ecotheology.

Yet there is more still in this first encyclical, since *Redemptor Hominis* also comments not just on what has gone wrong in our fundamental relationships with each other and the natural world, but also on how we need to understand right relationships, what dominion over the earth *should* entail. This is a mandate given to both men and women together, as made in the image of God, drawing on Genesis.¹⁷ He also notes humanity's alienation from nature, where it becomes merely a resource for 'immediate use and consumption'. Instead he suggests that it is the will of God as Creator of the good earth that the manner of human relationship with the natural world should be noble, rather than oppressive; master and guardian, rather than exploiter.¹⁸ But it would be a mistake to see any leaning towards biocentrism, rather he still takes seriously the command to 'subdue' the earth, but now it is mirrored after the pattern of Christ's kingship, which consists in 'the priority of ethics over technology, in the primacy of the person over things, and in the superiority of spirit over matter'.¹⁹ After the identification of ecological problems in terms of a moral and religious crisis is a more radical criticism of the financial and political systems of the day, viewing them as not solving global problems, but instead contributing to a deepening of environmental damage. These 'structures make the areas of misery spread' along with dilapidating material and energy resources.²⁰

Jame Schaefer *Theological Foundations for Environmental Ethics: Reconstructing Patristic and Medieval Concepts* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2009). For an attempt to clarify the relationship between the theologies of covenant and incarnation in their practical implications for eco-justice see C. Deane-Drummond, 'Deep Incarnation as Theodrama: A Dialogue Between Hans Urs von Balthasar and Martha Nussbaum', in Sigurd Bergmann and Heather Eaton, *Ecological Awareness: Exploring Religion, Ethics, Aesthetics* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2011) pp. 193–206. Although Niels Gregersen should be credited with coining the term 'deep incarnation' in the context of a discussion of theology and evolutionary suffering, it has been taken up and used in different ways by Edwards, Johnson and myself. See N. H. Gregersen, 'Deep Incarnation: Why Evolutionary Continuity Matters in Christology', *Toronto Theological Journal*, 26: 2 (2010) pp. 173–188.

¹⁶ *Redemptor Hominis*, §8.

¹⁷ *Redemptor Hominis*, §9.

¹⁸ *Redemptor Hominis*, §15.

¹⁹ *Redemptor Hominis*, §15.

²⁰ *Redemptor Hominis*, §15.

While *Redemptor Hominis* was a clear statement of environmental concern and a broad critique of existing practice and collective failure, *Laborem Excercens*, published in 1981 to mark the 90th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, continued the thread of a lack of adequate environmental responsibility and its moral and spiritual roots, but now the specific task of humanity becomes one that is more explicitly linked with sharing in the activity of the Creator.²¹ Genesis gives a biblical basis for the human mandate to ‘subdue’ the earth, except that such subjugation is not interpreted in terms of exploitation, but in ‘justice and holiness’; that is, the purpose of humanity is to mediate between the creaturely world and God in order to acknowledge the Creator as Lord of all. Hence, *Laborem Excercens* made explicit the belief that ‘by the subjection of all things to man, the name of God would be wonderful in all the earth’.²² This emphasis on kingship and the earth as *subject* to human will becomes reinforced still further by comparing the image-bearing capacity of human beings with a sharing in the activity of God as Creator. It amounts to an affirmation of human work up to the limit of human capability through ‘the discovery of the resources and values contained in the whole of creation’.²³ Human activity is therefore mapped as analogous to the work of God as Creator.

While the importance of restraint in polluting the earth or overuse of resources is at least a qualified attempt at environmental responsibility, it is perhaps somewhat naïve to assume that the earth in subjection to human intention will take on the pattern of holiness and justice in the way that this document implies. The idea of co-creation is also one that can easily slide into a mandate to do anything within human capacities, and at this stage the powers latent in, for example, genetic science were not so evident as they became even a quarter of a century later. In this sense it is easy to see why such documents can be interpreted as oppressively anthropocentric, even if the intention is theocentric.

Joining Ecology and Development in Catholic Social Teaching

By the time *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (SRS) appeared in 1987, the idea of ‘superdevelopment’ had become current, where goods are used to excess, embedded in ‘structures of sin’ that discriminated most against the newly developing nations.²⁴ However, we do not

²¹ *Laborem Excercens*, §25. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem-exercens_en.html, accessed 11 April 2011.

²² *Laborem Excercens*, §25.

²³ *Laborem Excercens*, §25.

²⁴ *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, §28 (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2003).

find the split between development and environmental concern that was prevalent in much of the literature of that period, instead environmental issues were viewed as something that needed to be recognised and taken account of in planning development projects.²⁵

Like earlier documents, this encyclical harks back to Genesis in order to put emphasis on the commonality between human beings and other creatures, but now the image of humanity as the *gardener* is used as a way of reflecting what true development should be like. Here we find once again the notion of respect for the goodness of the created world as well as the particular human manner of treating the natural world as structured after the divine likeness, rather than simply arising out of human whim or possessiveness.²⁶ SRS did not treat this as an explicitly male prerogative; rather it viewed this task as one shared by men and women working together. The basis for this is biblical, Genesis 1.27, where the ideal couple shows the reality of the human being is ‘fundamentally social’.

This idea of the sociality of human beings then permits a ready extension of human flourishing as understood in relationships with all living things. It is therefore understandable that the human task is portrayed in terms of a mandate to cultivate the garden, reiterating earlier statements about the need for this to conform to divine law.²⁷ It is the right exercise of human dominion over the earth ‘within the framework of obedience to divine law’ that is the means of human ‘perfection’.²⁸ In other words, ecological responsibility is not simply an optional extra for Christian discipleship, but the *very means through which humans become perfect* and express the image of God.

Here we find a theological anthropology that is grounded in the way we treat the natural world, the special *task* assigned to humanity, using texts from Genesis as well as Wisdom 9.2–3. What is particularly interesting in this document is an apparent recognition of the *agency* of the natural world. So, if ‘man’ refuses to submit to the rule of God, then ‘nature rebels against him and no longer recognises him as its “master”, for he has tarnished the divine image in himself’.²⁹ This is extremely interesting as the idea of agency in the natural world has only really surfaced strongly in ecotheological literature in radical projects such as the Earth Bible project, developed by Australian biblical scholar Norman Habel, who attempts to read

²⁵ *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, §26.

²⁶ *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, §29

²⁷ *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, §29

²⁸ *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, §30

²⁹ *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, §30 I am using ‘man’ in the generic sense, as otherwise the citation does not make sense, though I prefer the more inclusive term ‘humanity’.

biblical texts through an ecological lens.³⁰ While I doubt that the idea of agency was used in the strong sense, as in Habel, the fact this appears in the papal documents at all is of interest, for it implies a dynamic, responsive creation, even if the language of agency is likely to be figurative. Drawing on Genesis 3.17–19, SRS claims that, following human disobedience, what should have been an exercise of right relationships becomes instead ‘difficult and full of suffering’.³¹

It is this theological basis that strengthens the case for a view of development that weaves in an appropriate attitude to other living beings. In the first place, other creatures cannot be simply used for economic gain, but ‘one must take into account the nature of each being and of its mutual connection to an ordered system, which is precisely the cosmos’.³² Exactly *how* this might be taken into account in development terms is unfortunately not spelt out here, but what is important to note is that a firm affirmation of the status of living creatures is more than mere resources and is grounded in theological concepts. Any tension between the exercise of environmental responsibility and authentic development is not recognised since the latter presupposes the former. This is not least because natural resources are limited, so over-use puts future generations in jeopardy. In addition, the type of development exercised in industrialised zones implies a lack of proper respect for moral demands, because it pollutes the environment and damages human health. This is reinforced by a biblical flourish that stresses the importance of limitation in human actions by drawing on God’s strictures on Adam and Eve. These ideas are summed up in the following statement: ‘A true concept of development cannot ignore the use of the elements of nature, the renewability of resources and the consequences of haphazard industrialisation – three considerations that alert our consciences to the moral dimension of development’.³³

A similar thread is found in the encyclical *Centesimus Annus* (CA) (1991), which makes explicit the ecological consequences of improper consumerism and which favours a holistic understanding of development that takes into account environmental concern. A new emphasis is placed here on another aspect of the Genesis creation text, namely, the idea of the earth as God’s *gift* to the *whole* human

³⁰ For discussion of the Earth Bible Project see C.Deane-Drummond, *Ecotheology* (London: DLT, 2008) pp. 88–93. A scholarly discussion of ecological hermeneutics of biblical texts can be found Horrell, et al. (eds), *Ecological Hermeneutics*.

³¹ *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, §30

³² *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, §34.

³³ *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, §34. Space does not permit an interlude on what the role of conscience might play here, but I have argued for a collective conscience in relation to core areas of environmental responsibility that demand a collective response. See C.Deane-Drummond, ‘A Case for Collective Conscience: Climategate, COP-15 and Climate Justice’, *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 24 (1) (2011) pp. 5–22

race without discrimination, thus providing the ontological foundation for the idea of the common good.³⁴ The document also speaks here about the need for cooperation between different peoples so that all can 'dominate the earth', thus edging uneasily towards a view of the earth that is subject to human control. In view of what I have argued earlier, the language of domination is somewhat surprising, but this may reflect an ambiguity within the text itself and a tendency in some places to revert to an anthropocentric view that puts too much emphasis on human control and power over the earth.³⁵ The assumption in this text is that as long as that domination is perceived as in accordance with God's will, it is licit. What is illicit is an unbridled consumerism, particularly prevalent in Western economies that put more emphasis on a 'desire to have and to enjoy rather than to be and to grow', and in this way, humanity 'consumes the resources of the earth and his own life in an excessive and disordered way'.³⁶

He therefore identifies the root of ecological destruction as based fundamentally in 'an anthropological error' because human beings forget that their power to create 'is always based on God's prior and original gift of the things that are'. Human beings must, therefore, respect the requisites embedded in the natural world and its God-given purposes, 'which man can indeed develop but must not betray'.³⁷ A similar idea of *agency* in the natural world, rising up in response to human rebellion noted in SRS comes to the surface again, so 'Instead of carrying out his role as a co-operator with God in the work of creation, man sets himself up in place of God and thus ends up provoking a rebellion on the part of nature, which is more tyrannized than governed by him'.³⁸

³⁴ *Centesimus Annus* §31. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_01051991_centesimus-annus_en.html, accessed 11 April 2011.

³⁵ An alternative explanation is that this is a translation error, but the original Latin text does not suggest this. Even within one paragraph (§31) we find 'It is through work that man, using his intelligence and exercising his freedom, succeeds in dominating the earth and making it a fitting home', while earlier in the same paragraph there is a more qualified account of human dominion and the earth as a gift of God, providing the ontological basis for a just society; so 'The original source of all that is good is the very act of God . . . who gave the earth to man that he might have dominion over it by his works and enjoy its fruits (Gen 1.28). God gave the earth to the whole human race for the sustenance of all its members, without excluding or favouring anyone. This is the *foundation of the universal destination of the earth's goods*.' The original Latin text reads in the second case ' . . . hominem hominique terram dedit ut in eam *dominaretur* labore suo eiusque frueretur fructibus'. In the first case, that appears later in the same paragraph we find: 'per laborem homo utens intelligentia et libertate sua in eam *dominatur* eamque suam facit dignam sedem' (italics mine). There does seem, in other words, to be a genuine distinction made here, which introduces an ambiguity into the text.

³⁶ *Centesimus Annus*, §37.

³⁷ *Centesimus Annus*, §37.

³⁸ *Centesimus Annus*, §37.

I suggest that it is the context of trying to find a way of linking questions about ecological issues with developmental problems that allows Pope John Paul II to develop what is arguably one of the most interesting aspects of his approach to ecological issues, namely, his interpretation of *human ecology*. In commenting on the value of preserving the natural habitat of other species, he comments that ‘too little effort is made to *safeguard the moral conditions for an authentic human ecology*’.³⁹ He draws on this term, which was originally developed by social scientists,⁴⁰ in order to stress the importance of considering what he believes are the *ontological* conditions needed for human flourishing. In this way he can claim that,

man too is God’s gift to man. He must therefore respect the natural and moral structure with which he has been endowed.⁴¹

He is therefore reinforcing one of the traditional aspects of CST, namely, that there is an ontological basis for moral law that is rooted in the doctrine of creation, and it is the violation of this law that is the most fundamental reason behind the ecological crisis.

The ideas developed in SRS and CA in relation to ecology are summarised in a useful way in *Evangelium Vitae* (1995):

As one called to till and look after the garden of the world (cf Gen 2.15), man has a specific responsibility towards the environment in which he lives, towards the creation which God has put at the service of his personal dignity, of his life, not only for the present but also for future generations. It is the ecological question – ranging from the preservation of the natural habitats of different species of animals and other forms of life to “human ecology” properly speaking – which finds in the Bible clear and strong ethical direction, leading to a solution which respects the great good of life, of every life. In fact 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 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 (c.f. 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’.⁴²

³⁹ *Centesimus Annus*, §38. Italics in original.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Amos Hawley, *Human Ecology: A Theory of Community Structure* (New York: Ronald Press, 1950); William R. Catton, ‘Foundations of Human Ecology’, *Sociological Perspectives* 37 (1) (1994), 75–95. I am grateful to Peter Conley for drawing particular attention to the term ‘human ecology’ in the writing of Pope John Paul II. Conley is, however, more concerned with how this term has evolved in its continued use and fruitfulness for educational and other contexts, rather than how it might have proved useful for Pope John Paul II in the context of environmental and developmental questions.

⁴¹ *Centesimus Annus*, §38.

⁴² *Evangelium Vitae* §42 (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1995).

It is therefore hardly surprising that in Pope Benedict XVI's World Day of Peace message of 2007, he cites CA in affirming an ecology of nature existing alongside 'a "human" ecology, which in turn demands a "social" ecology'.⁴³ While I will come back to the implications this has for global peace, what is relevant in the present discussion is the close parallel made between ecological flourishing and human flourishing. Hence, when it comes to *Caritas in Veritate* (CV) (2009), the most recent encyclical dedicated to a discussion of authentic development, it is not surprising that ecological issues gain the attention that is clearly in evidence here. Any suggestion, however, that a discussion of environmental issues in this encyclical marks a break from the past is clearly misguided, since Benedict XVI is faithful to his promise to build on the work of Pope John Paul II.

There are some new elements in the precise way the problem is framed in terms of Benedict XVI's specific concern with philosophies prevalent in the Western world, so adding, for example, criticism of the way 'nature, including the human being, is viewed as the result of mere chance or evolutionary determinism'.⁴⁴ He is critical, then, of scientism or forms of naturalism that reduce the worth of nature 'to a collection of contingent data'.⁴⁵ Rather 'it is a wondrous work of the Creator containing a "grammar" which sets forth ends and criteria for its wise use, not its reckless exploitation'.⁴⁶ Like John Paul II, Benedict XVI understands the natural world as an expression of God's 'design of love and truth' and the natural basis on which human life depends, given as a gift of God to humanity. Benedict XVI is more explicit, perhaps, in spelling out the specific dangers in a turn to nature expressed as a new pantheism, and as well as arguing against the technological domination already noted by Pope John Paul II. Both of these notions, for Benedict XVI, lead to distorted forms of development.

However, as in much of Pope John Paul II's writing, both the negative and positive trajectories of development are spoken about in very general terms, so it is not clear in what precise social or political contexts such attitudes might prevail. The concrete examples, such as the hoarding of non-renewable energy resources by some nation-states or companies and the need for more regulation,⁴⁷ are still generalised so that they do not seem to demand a more radical restructuring of economic and political systems. Again, suggestions

⁴³ Benedict XVI, World Day of Peace Message, 2007. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20061208_xl-world-day-peace_en.html, accessed 11 April 2011.

⁴⁴ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, §48 (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2009).

⁴⁵ *Caritas in Veritate*, §48.

⁴⁶ *Caritas in Veritate*, §48.

⁴⁷ *Caritas in Veritate*, §49.

that advanced societies must lower their energy consumption, either through alternative energy, or greater restraint in use,⁴⁸ still keeps the market systems basically intact.

There are, nonetheless, some hints of the kind of ethos a new economy might adopt, and Benedict XVI's critique of the current global economy and its replacement with what he terms an economy of gratuitousness is a good example. So 'economic, social and political development, if it is to be authentically human, needs to make room for the principle of gratuitousness as an expression of fraternity'.⁴⁹ One might ask, whence comes this principle? It is clear that the idea that 'The human being is made for gift'⁵⁰ comes from the belief in creation, that the earth is the fundamental gift of God to human beings, and each person is a gift to the other. In Benedict XVI we find this principle of giftedness becoming more explicitly woven into a pattern not just for individual human relationships, but *structural* relationships of politics and the economy as well. In this way, one of the more original aspects of Benedict XVI's manifesto emerges directly out of his appreciation of the creaturely basis of human life. In practice this takes the shape of, for example, criticising the 'structural causes' behind food insecurity and calling for 'involvement of local communities in choices and decisions that affect the use of agricultural land'.⁵¹

Ecological Conversion in Catholic Social Teaching

But how, one might ask, does Catholic Social Teaching envisage a movement from the current state of environmental decay to one that begins to approach the integrated view of an authentic development grounded in creaturely life? I suggest that a metaphor for the kind of movement required is encapsulated in the concept of *ecological conversion*.⁵² This term was first used by Pope John Paul II in 2001 in an address to a general audience in St Peter's Square and seems to refer in this first instance to the *general* trend towards greater environmental awareness in the light of ecological problems. He writes, 'It is necessary therefore, to stimulate and sustain the "ecological conversion", which over these last decades has made humanity more sensitive when facing the catastrophe towards which it

⁴⁸ *Caritas in Veritate*, §49.

⁴⁹ *Caritas in Veritate*, §34.

⁵⁰ *Caritas in Veritate*, §34.

⁵¹ *Caritas in Veritate*, §27.

⁵² I have also written about ecological conversion in 'Ecological Conversion in a Changing Climate: An Ecumenical Perspective on Ecological Solidarity', *International Journal of Orthodox Theology*, 2012, *in press*.

is moving . . . ’⁵³ He then goes on to discuss the link between physical ecology and human ecology, mentioned above, as a way of reinforcing the theological mandate for such a conversion. However, a few years later in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Gregis* (2003), the term ecological conversion takes on a new dynamic, one that has more explicitly theological elements and so *follows* the discussion of human ecology, rather than being prior to it. In this way he summarises the close link between human ecology, ecological conversion and the ethical mandate of responsible stewardship:

Clearly, what is called for is not simply a physical ecology, concerned with the protecting the habitat of various living beings, but a *human ecology*, capable of protecting the radical good of life in all its manifestations and of leaving behind for future generations an environment which conforms as closely as possible to the Creator’s plan. There is a need for *ecological conversion*, to which Bishops themselves can contribute by their teaching about the correct relationship of human beings with nature. Seen in the light of the doctrine of God the Father, the maker of heaven and earth, this relationship is one of “stewardship”: human beings are set at the centre of creation as stewards of the Creator.⁵⁴

The shift to a more explicitly theological understanding of ecological conversion may also be seen in the Declaration on Environmental Ethics, written as a Joint Statement with the Ecumenical Patriarchate Bartholomew I, released on 10 June 2002. This statement affirms the need to recognise the divine design for creation but now asks for a genuine change of heart so that,

A solution at the economic and technological level can be found only if we undergo, in the most radical way, an *inner change of heart*, which can lead to a change in lifestyle and of unsustainable patterns of consumption and production. A genuine conversion in Christ will enable us to change the way we think and act.⁵⁵

⁵³ Pope John Paul II, ‘Address to a General Audience’, St Peter’s Square, 17 January 2001. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/audiences/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_20010117_en.html accessed 4 June, 2007. This is also the sense in which the term ecological conversion seems to be taken by the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales by situating this quotation in the context of greater environmental awareness in *The Call of Creation: God’s Invitation and the Human Response, The Natural Environment and Catholic Social Teaching* (London: Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales, 2nd edn., 2003) p. 5.

⁵⁴ Pope John Paul II, *Pastores Gregis*, §70 (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2003). Italics in original.

⁵⁵ Common Declaration of John Paul II and the Ecumenical Patriarch, His Holiness Bartholomew 1, 10 June 2002. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/2002/june/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20020610_venice-declaration_en.html accessed 15 June 2007, also reprinted with commentary in C.Deane-Drummond, *Seeds of Hope: Facing the Challenge of Climate Justice* (London: CAFOD, 2009), pp. 152–55.

Linking *metanoia* or conversion with ecological and, more specifically, *Christological* themes is characteristic of earlier writing from the Ecumenical Patriarchate.⁵⁶ However, such a view coheres well with the general intention of Pope John Paul II's social teaching and this joint declaration shows that he certainly supported such a position. Indeed, the theological basis for linking what might be termed environmental and human ecology comes through reflection on the *cosmic* significance of Christ, for example:

The incarnation of God the Son signifies the taking up into unity with God not only human nature, but in this human nature, in a sense, of everything that is "flesh": the whole of humanity, the entire visible and material world. The incarnation, then also has a cosmic significance, a cosmic dimension. The "first-born of all creation", becoming incarnate in the individual humanity of Christ, unites himself in some way with the entire reality of man, which is also "flesh" – and in this reality with all "flesh", with the whole of creation.⁵⁷

A more profound Christological basis for ecological conversion also ties in with Pope John Paul II's idea of linking mercy to the natural world as well as to inter-human relationships, hence:

The word and the concept of "mercy" seem to cause uneasiness in man, who, thanks to the enormous development of science and technology, never before known in history, has become the master of the earth and has subdued and dominated it. This dominion over the earth, sometimes understood in a one-sided and superficial way, seems to leave no room for mercy.⁵⁸

It is important to note that he is *critical* here of the idea of human beings dominating the earth.

⁵⁶ *Metanoia* is associated with sanctification and ascetic practices as relevant to environmental practices. See Ecumenical Patriarchate Bartholomew, 'Religion, Science and the Environment Symposia: Official Opening, Symposium I, Istanbul, Turkey, September 22nd, 1995', in John Chryssavgis, ed., *On Earth as in Heaven: Ecological Vision and Initiatives of Ecumenical Patriarchate Bartholomew* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 215–212 and 'Keynote Address at the Santa Barbara Symposium, California, November 8th, 1997', in *On Earth as in Heaven*, pp. 95–100. Space does not permit a full discussion of the full range of writings produced by the Ecumenical Patriarchate on ecology, but the official website describes him as a 'Green Patriarch' and gives links to a number of official statements, <http://www.patriarchate.org/environment>, accessed 12 September 2011.

⁵⁷ *Dominum et Vivificantem (On the Life of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church)*. DV §50 http://www.vatican.va/edocs/ENG0142/_INDEX.HTM, accessed 14 May 2009.

⁵⁸ *Dives in Misericordia* (1980) §2. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30111980_dives-in-misericordia_en.html, accessed 12 April 2011.

Ecology, Justice and World Peace

Charting the relationship between Catholic Social Teaching and its specific understanding of ecology would be inadequate without some reference to global peace-making that has been woven into the general discussion, especially through the World Day of Peace messages, beginning in 1990 with Pope John Paul II's *Peace with All Creation* and ending with Benedict XVI's 2010 address, *If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation*. The consistent message in these documents is the linking of a right relationship with God and a proper care of creation through global security. In *Peace with All Creation*, the earth is portrayed as having a sense of agency: 'If man is not at peace with God, then earth itself cannot be at peace'.⁵⁹ This lack of peace is expressed in an irresponsible use of science and technology. He specifically mentions the long-term impact of industrialization leading to the 'greenhouse effect' with its threat to future generations and those in low-lying communities.⁶⁰

A lack of peace also finds a practical outcome in the lack of respect for human life, including environmental pollution. This raises the issue of what might be termed *environmental injustice*, which is the disproportionate impact of environmental damage to poor communities. While he does not mention ecological justice as such, John Paul II is sharply critical of those who upset 'delicate ecological balances' by 'uncontrolled destruction of animal and plant life', which have a negative impact on human well-being.⁶¹ The third aspect that he identifies is the consequences of biological research and the results of 'indiscriminate genetic manipulation'. Without ethical norms, he says that this 'would lead mankind to the very threshold of self-destruction'.⁶²

For Pope John Paul II the solution to these problems is to reinstate respect for the cosmos and for the natural order of things. This would then lead to a responsible and fair use of the earth, but problems have to be tackled on a global scale. He saw, perhaps more clearly than other Statesmen, that global issues required global cooperation and

⁵⁹ Pope John Paul II World Day of Peace Message, 1990, *Peace With All Creation*, §5. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace_en.html, accessed 12 April 2011.

⁶⁰ *Peace with All Creation*, §6.

⁶¹ *Peace with All Creation*, §7. I am using the term *ecological justice* to refer specifically to the damage to creaturely kinds other than human beings, often through loss of habitat leading to extinction or near extinction; and *environmental justice* to the damage to some human communities rather than others, usually the poorest members of human societies. For further discussion of ecological justice and environmental justice see C. Deane-Drummond, 'Environmental Justice and the Economy: A Christian Theologian's View', *Ecotology*, 2006 11 (3) 2006, pp. 294–310.

⁶² *Peace With All Creation*, §7.

mutual respect. He also understood that global environmental problems cannot be solved in isolation from problems of global poverty and its structural manifestations.⁶³ Furthermore, he envisaged an interlocking set of ethical problems ranging from global warfare and its ecological and human impact to the need for better education in ecological responsibility. But the shift in thinking has to begin with a traditional affirmation of the *family* as the basic social unit of society. One of the difficulties of collating all these ideas is that when one raises what might be termed neuralgic ethical issues around idealised family life, the ecological discussion can become overlooked. While this is clearly a misreading, there is a persistent neglect of environmental problems in compilations of Catholic Social Teaching. A unique feature of this message, however, that shows Pope John Paul II's particular affinity with the natural world is his recognition of the *aesthetic* value of the natural world as a means for peace:

Our very contact with nature has a deep restorative power; contemplation of its magnificence imparts peace and serenity. The Bible speaks again and again of the beauty and goodness of creation, which is called to glorify God (cf Gen 1.4ff; Ps 8.2; 104.1 ff; Wis 13.3–5; Sir 39.16, 33; 43.1, 9). More difficult perhaps, but no less profound, is the contemplation of the works of human ingenuity. Even cities can have a beauty all of their own, one that ought to motivate people to care for their surroundings.⁶⁴

His final summing up of the theological reasons for caring for creation includes an exhortation to recognise that the natural world is itself capable of giving praise to God: '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)'.⁶⁵ This points to an eschatological movement which is clear enough in a cosmic Christology that is scattered throughout the documents, for what is envisaged is not simply an alignment of Christ with creation but, following Colossians 1, a movement through suffering and the cross to redemption. The extent to which the *natural world* is caught up in the movement of redemption is, nonetheless, left undeveloped in these documents, since the focus is on the social teaching of the Church and its practical implications for living in present concerns.

Pope Benedict XVI, although he is clearly taking up the broad message of ecological conversion, especially as that which relates to a particular interpretation of human ecology, does not put as much emphasis on the aesthetic value of the natural world. If anything, he is more concerned with the possible dangers of pantheism. Nonetheless,

⁶³ *Peace With All Creation*, §11.

⁶⁴ *Peace With All Creation*, §14.

⁶⁵ *Peace With All Creation*, §16.

his World Day of Peace message for 2010 is of interest because – coming strategically just after the somewhat fraught United Nations global discussion on climate change that took place in Copenhagen in 2009 – it brought a much needed moral and religious dimension to the current debate.⁶⁶ Although Benedict XVI spoke about an ecology of peace and human ecology in his World Day of Peace message for 2007 entitled *The Human Person, the Heart of Peace*, his message is somewhat compressed and does not go much further than the 1990 message of Pope John Paul II, so that humanity:

if it truly desires peace, must be increasingly conscious of the links between natural ecology, or respect for nature, and human ecology. Experience always shows that disregard for the environment always harms human coexistence and vice versa. It becomes more and more evident that there is an inseparable link between peace with creation and peace among men. Both of these presuppose peace with God.

His 2010 World Day of Peace message, which deals specifically with the interconnection between world peace and the protection of creation, enlarges on this theme, reiterating the traditional theological connections, already traced by Pope John Paul II, between the idea of creation as God's gift, the call for human responsibility rather than domination of the earth, and the root cause of all broken relationships in the disobedience of the first couple. While he does mention the value of contemplation of the natural world as a means of acknowledging God's love, this aspect is played down compared with Pope John Paul II.⁶⁷ His ideal for humanity is one of partnership with God, though he uses the more qualified term co-worker rather than co-creator.⁶⁸ As in earlier documents, he here reinforces the link between poverty and environmental concerns, but he now specifically mentions climate change, conflicts involving natural resources and environmental refugees, that is 'people who are forced by the degradation of their natural habitat to forsake it – and often their

⁶⁶ For further discussion of ethical and theological issues associated with COP-15 see C.Deane-Drummond, 'Public Theology as Contested Ground: Arguments for Climate Justice', in C.Deane-Drummond and H. Bedford Stroh, eds., *Religion and Ecology in the Public Sphere* (London: Continuum, 2011) pp. 189–210.

⁶⁷ Benedict XVI, *World Day of Peace Message, If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation*, 1 January 2010, §2, §13. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20091208_xliiii-world-day-peace_en.html accessed 11 April 2011. He writes in paragraph 13, for example, of the value that 'many people' experience in coming into contact with 'the beauty and harmony of nature'. This may suggest that he does not have such experiences himself and that this is an idealised perception of ecology according to the natural world understood as existing in harmonious relationships. The lack of an adequate ecological perception is somewhat disappointing.

⁶⁸ *World Day of Peace Message*, 2010

possessions as well – in order to face the dangers and uncertainties of forced displacement'.⁶⁹

A facet that is rather more developed here than with Pope John Paul II is the issue of justice for future generations and what he terms 'intergenerational solidarity'. So he writes, '*The ecological crisis shows the urgency of a solidarity which embraces time and space*'.⁷⁰ The quest for world-wide authentic solidarity 'inspired by the values of charity, justice and the common good' marks out for Benedict XVI the *deepest* motivation for getting involved in tackling environmental problems. In other words, the rationale for dealing with environmental issues relates ultimately to issues of social justice. This is, however, a shared responsibility, one that also includes less developed countries, even though the present cause of ecological problems has stemmed historically from the activities of industrialised nations. Solidarity is also important for Benedict XVI as, following his predecessor, he views all current ecological problems as being interconnected: economic, food-related, environmental and social. Solidarity also comes to be expressed through the notion of human ecology. The theological basis for such solidarity is Christological, drawing on the cosmic Christology of Colossians 1.15–20, though this dimension is not developed.

Preliminary Conclusions

In this paper I have argued that far from being an afterthought in Roman Catholic social teaching, the awareness of the need for environmental responsibility has been there from the beginning of the emergence of ecotheology. There are, however, distinctive aspects to the way the issue has been discussed which are worth noting. In the first place, it is rooted in fundamental doctrines of creation, Christology and anthropology. The ecological crisis is, therefore, not simply an external problem but reflects a profound religious and moral crisis as well. Genesis is drawn on to a large extent, but a cosmic Christology and what might be termed *deep incarnation* lends theological weight to ecological issues, for it enters the heart of Christian theology. This provides a basis for developing a particular theological

⁶⁹ *World Day of Peace Message*, 2010 §4 The particular issue of climate change has been discussed in more detail by the US Bishops in 2001, under the title of '*Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good*'. Similar themes of care for God's creation, the need for stewardship, a call for authentic development prevail in this document. As the title suggests, the virtue of prudence is given special emphasis, but the authors' summary of prudence simply as 'intelligence applied to our actions' is thin compared with the rich theological resources embedded in classical discussions. See <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/globalclimate.shtml>.

⁷⁰ *World Day of Peace Message*, 2010, §8.

anthropology under the expression *human ecology*, for, as in CST as a whole, the importance of the human is never far from the foreground. The difference now, however, is that, in being called to receive the earth as God's gift, human beings are also given a mandate to act responsibly towards the earth in accordance with God's intentions, expressed through images such as gardener, co-creator, co-worker, rather than through their own selfish desires.

The idea of 'responsible stewardship' sums up the ethical intention, showing that human beings are still considered superior to the rest of the natural order. They are not given permission to exploit it indiscriminately but must show it the respect it deserves as God's good creation. While 'stewardship' has been the topic of some critical debate among ecotheologians because it implies that human beings are capable of managing the planet, this is precisely what CST suggests. However, it makes such a suggestion in the light of a submissive attitude to the Creator of all that is, rather than through hubristic intentions to self-glorification. The call for *ecological conversion* is, therefore, theologically conservative in that it does not demand a weakening of the place of the human, but calls for a fundamental awareness of the connectedness of human beings to all forms of life and human responsibility in the light of that interconnection. An ecological dynamic becomes woven into core threads in CST such as solidarity and social justice. We might say in a metaphorical sense that ecology joins in the dance made specific in Catholic social thought, one that stresses the need for authentic human development and the emergence of the common good.

Yet perhaps the place of other creaturely kinds is not given quite the attention they deserve; we find hints of an idealised view of natural, stable, harmonious ecology, rather than a recognition either of suffering in the natural world, or fluid and dynamic ecological processes. In addition, the full implication of cosmic Christology for redemption is not made explicit. In other words, while the goodness of the natural order is romanticised, and the suffering of the natural world identified with human exploitation of it, the significance of the resurrection of Christ for the created order is not discussed. What is given an eschatological dimension is the role of humanity in relation to the natural world, both as part of nature from the beginning and yet having a unique mandate within it to care for the earth in a way that expresses our full humanity. While there are occasional lapses into more strident calls for human domination rather than dominion of the earth, the overall tenor is one of careful stewardship under the watchful eye of God, who has given the earth to humans. The concept of human rule under obedience to divine law and even the ideal of stewardship are perhaps optimistic in the light of the human tendency towards sin in managing relationships of power, and certainly will

not satisfy some ecotheologians, but they do at least move away from domination.

Nonetheless, I suggest that the specific contribution of Catholic social teaching to ecological thinking in this area is, in spite of these difficulties, profound and deeply significant, given its authority for millions of persons across the world. Hence, its call for ecological solidarity and world peace have the potential to make a global and local impact that is vital in working out an adequate global response, both for present and future generations. While the details of what might be done is often left vague, and while there is also a disappointing failure to understand the nature of ecological systems, the approach presented here needs to become much more widely appreciated if it is to ever have the impact intended, not least among theologians, religious leaders and educationalists. Indeed one might say that the future of humanity as a whole and global security may depend upon it, for without collective action there is little chance of changes that will be sufficient to deal with the global reach of environmental and climate change, including environmental justice and ecological justice.

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