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Integral Ecology: “Face-to-Face with the Infinite Beauty of God”

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Introduction

Drawing on the work of Romano Guardini, Pope Francis in Chapter Three of *Laudato si* critiques the “technocratic paradigm”—not the blessings of technology, but rather a reductive mindset that pits humans against nature in a relationship of manipulative mastery and control, going so far as to “impos[e] this model on reality as a whole” (*LS*, 107). As part of that critique, in the section “The Crisis and Effects of Modern Anthropocentrism,” the Pope says that since anthropocentrism, which places human beings and their interests at the center of everything, views nature only as “an object of utility, as raw material to be hammered into useful shape,” it compromises “the intrinsic dignity of the world” (115). This is disconcerting to some responders to the encyclical, who see the Pope’s attack on anthropocentrism and all his talk about the interconnectedness of humans and nature as a kind of cover for a covert environmentalism which would (as St. John Paul II put it), eliminate “the ontological and axiological difference between men and other living beings.”^[i]

Nothing could be further from the truth. The thesis of anthropocentrism did, in fact and inevitably, give rise to its antithesis, a “biocentrism” (or “ecocentrism”) that calls itself “holistic,” in the specific sense of seeing reality as a relational web, and valuing persons no more than any other species. Pope Francis also speaks of a “web of relationships” (*LS*, 240), but it is in the context of the unique dignity of persons and the integrity of other beings. Persons are not atomistic individuals nor do they dissolve into the biotic flow, but live in a “communion with God, with others and with all creatures” (*LS*, 240). Hence he rejects biocentrism as well. As an answer to anthropocentrism, biocentrism simply gives us “yet another imbalance, failing to solve present problems and adding new ones”; we end with a situation in which “a technocracy which sees no intrinsic value in lesser beings coexists with the other extreme, which sees no

special value in human beings” (118).

The critique is not new. John Paul II and Benedict XVI called us to a vision of a relational Whole, not of “holism” as a closed totality, but as always open in humility, readiness, and receptivity to that which transcends worldly being. When they wrote or spoke on anthropocentrism or biocentrism, it was not because they preferred one over the other but because they did not share the presuppositions of either. They did not answer the thesis/antithesis opposition with a dialectical synthesis, merging the sides in a kind of overlapping Venn diagram that would take the best from each and leave out the worst. Instead they opened the discussion of “centrality” to a truly new horizon: as Benedict XVI put it, we live in an “open parabola,” with our center lying outside ourselves.^[ii] Pope Francis continues their critique as well as their assertion that human and natural ecology are intrinsically, integrally related; hence the “Integral Ecology” of *Laudato si*, open to “God, our neighbor, and the earth itself” (LS, 66).

It appears to many ecologists that all Christians are by definition anthropocentric in the negative sense;^[iii] conversely, it appears to many Christians that all ecologists are biocentric in the sense of believing in a “bad holism” that denies substantive differences between persons and other created things. In Part One of this essay we consider where these two stances came from and why each one misrepresents the position of the other. There are indeed similarities between the Catholic and ecological critiques of modernity, but the crucial differences are greater; in Part Two, we look at two contrasting responses based on the notion of a “face-to-face encounter” between the person and nature, that of eco-philosopher Edward Casey and Catholic philosopher Robert Spaemann. Spaemann understands that the various person/nature dualisms cannot be dialectically resolved. Reconciliation requires a deeper and prior unity that allows the differences to be ordered to each other, and to be positively related while still retaining their own integrity; in Part Three we turn to the last chapter of *Laudato si* and the ultimate face-to-face encounter. “Reality can be falsified by a thousand ideologies; even so, it has only one Father,”^[iv] who is “the loving and self-communicating foundation of all that exists” (LS, 238). We may be “faced ... with global environmental deterioration” (3), and we may all live in “the face of the ... culture of death” (213), but “we are faced not with two separate crises” (139), one natural due to anthropocentrism and one human due to biocentrism. Instead, “face to face with the infinite beauty of God” (243), we see that we are in “universal communion” (76, 220) with all creation. The face of God resolves for us into the face of the Incarnate Christ, who “united himself to this earth” and whose Spirit is “intimately present at the very heart of the universe” (238). The phrase “Integral Ecology” perhaps sounds like something that primarily concerns the postulates and methods of the social sciences as projected toward environmental protection, but its true meaning is that the heart of reality is personal, Trinitarian love that encompasses all being. As sharers in this communion, we may respect both the uniqueness of the person as well as the dignity of all other creatures, who are gifts of God and bearers of His beauty.

PART ONE: Biocentrism and Anthropocentrism

I.

The Pope's title for Chapter Three of *Laudato si*—"The Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis"—deliberately echoes what is perhaps the most widely anthologized environmental essay, Lynn White's 1967 "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis."^[v] This seminal paper was the harshest environmentalist attack on Christianity to that point,^[vi] and White's polemic became the template for environmental writing for decades. Using deliberately provocative language ("Christian arrogance toward nature") he traces the ecological crisis to Christianity's contrast with a paganism that sees nature as divine, and to the Judeo-Christian creation story and its call for "dominion," which White read as exploitative "domination."

The cultural/historical arguments were refuted by many historians, biblical scholars, social scientists, and even environmentalists, and are too voluminous to review.^[vii] It was specifically White's use of "anthropocentric" as a pejorative—called "the main conceptual breakthrough of White's essay"^[viii]—that is of interest here: "Especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen.... Christianity... not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends."^[ix] A number of environmental ethicists see the opposition between an atomistic anthropocentrism and a holistic biocentrism—including, respectively, the claims that the things of nature have either only instrumental value for humans, or have their own intrinsic value^[x]—as perhaps the defining ecological debate of our time.

Without mentioning Heidegger or Nietzsche, White passed on some of their critique of Greek and Christian metaphysics, in which eco-philosophers claimed to have found the roots of the ecological crisis in an (alleged) emphasis on transcendence and an (alleged) contempt for immanence. Ecologists saw Christians as holding a two-tier view of all of reality: Erazim Kohák says, "Nature appears dead to us in great part because we have grown accustomed to thinking of God as 'super-natural,' absent from nature and not to be found therein,"^[xi] while Max Oelschlaeger repudiates the dichotomy between "disembodied souls seeking transcendental ends" on the one hand and "a natural world of brute facticity" on the other.^[xii]

Linking the two tier-split and anthropocentrism to Christianity as such is anachronistic; it was the Enlightenment's "fourfold anthropocentric shift" (Charles Taylor's term, referencing the eclipse of telos/purpose, grace, mystery, and the transformation of human beings^[xiii]) that brought about the rupture from and disenchantment with the natural order, opening the way to exploitation. White excoriated one strand of late medieval thought that culminated in the Protestant Reformation's fissure between faith and reason (which undergirded the Enlightenment), while ignoring the other, the Catholic position upon which *Laudato si* is based. He criticizes the "voluntarism" of the Latin West without mentioning the relation between voluntarism and an ontology that departed from an earlier one. The newer one had a univocal conception of being (both God and creatures fall under the same genus, *Being*) that gives rise to a competitive opposition between creatures and Creator, and pits the will and human freedom against the constraints of both nature and God. The older one, represented best by Aquinas, was

analogical and participatory (God falls under no genus; His being is being itself, giving being to all creatures). Departure from this ontology means that, “unanchored from their shared participation in God, no longer grounded in a common source, creatures lose their essential connectedness to one another.”[xiv]

It is only the newer position that could have given rise to the antagonism between today’s anthropocentrism and biocentrism. The analogical conception does not. And lest one think this conception is a relic of the past, it in fact continues in the best theology of the 21st century. In ecological thinking it remembers the patristic/Medieval notion of man as microcosm and mediator, an *imago mundi* who “contains all things,”[xv] integrally related to and responsible for them, reconciling the uniqueness of the person with an intrinsic communion with nature (*LS*, 15, 43, 69, 81, etc.). The relation between the person and nature is analogous to the prior relation of God and the world in which, recalling the words of the Fourth Lateran Council, the differences are always greater than the similarities. The vast majority of ecologists followed White, which explains the straw-man aspect of ecological diatribes against Christianity.

II.

Critics of ecological thinking tend to consider only eco-philosophies of identity, in which the central values of holism and relationality take on an absolutist form. The “all-is-one” identity can be pantheistic or idealistic, in which case everything is seen as God or Idea or Spirit; or it can be natural, in which everything is ultimately material, whether that takes the final form of reduction to physical energy, or allows “emergent” higher-order beings to be considered “real.”

The truth is that many eco-philosophers are sensitive to the same tensions as the three popes (including the tension between static, closed “forms” and dynamic “events” or “processes”). The anthropocentric/instrumental value/atomism and the biocentric/intrinsic value/holism positions are just mirror images, they say, of a single error, and both result in the loss not only of natural entities but also of persons. On the biocentric side, Arne Naess, the father of modern 20th century holism (“Deep Ecology”), had reduced things and persons to a Heraclitean flux in which there is no room for substantial beings. Eco-philosopher Michael Zimmerman responded that “in suggesting that organisms are temporary phenomenal gestalts lacking selfhood, substance, and essence, Naess verges on Nominalism.” Naess, he continued, influenced by Mahayana Buddhism’s contention that there are no enduring substances, may have been drawn to its “compassion toward all beings,” but a number of ecologists regard this form of compassion as paradoxical, since there ultimately *are* no beings. On the other side, Heidegger, Guardini, and others pointed out that the technocratic mindset soon extends to persons, so that, as Robert Spaemann said, “man himself turns into an anthropomorphism.”[xvi] By this he means that when anthropocentrists treat natural entities as mechanisms, soon they cannot even ascribe human motives to humans: everything from a mother’s care for her child to the virtues are functionalized to evolutionary or genetic origins, or reduced to a transitory state.

Romand Coles is another postmodern ecologist who belies the popular stereotype of the “holistic environmentalist.” He sees unacceptable false dichotomies in the concepts of “intrinsic versus

instrumental value” and “holism versus atomism,” which are concomitant with biocentrism versus anthropocentrism:

Intrinsic value? I think the very term abstracts from the ... interrelationships in which all beings are located and construes value atomistically. [Neither] should we move from atomism to a totalizing ecological ethical holism in which particular beings fail to emerge as distinctly worthy of reverence....Beings, in their radical otherness, are captured neither by the logic of identity [holism] nor that of contradiction [dualism], but rather require a difficult elaboration of overlappings, tensions, and paradoxes—all of which are too multiplicitous ever to be reduced.[xvii]

Eco-philosophers have pointed out many other inconsistencies and incoherencies in the standard view of biocentrism, including problems with how a “whole” is delineated (specifying ecosystem boundaries in a web in which all relationships are supposed to be equal), and needing the human perspective in order to judge that the human perspective is not pre-eminent.

Dividing Christians and ecologists in terms of anthropocentrism and biocentrism makes little sense to either. And in the end, arguing for one side of the dichotomy, or tinkering with new dialectical solutions as criticisms arise, is like adding epicycles to planetary orbits to try and save the appearances of the perfectly circular orbits of the Ptolemaic system. The anthropocentric/biocentric divide is a dead end, and the interminable permutations of theories about how to value individuals in relation to the whole, and persons with other natural entities, is a displacement of larger questions that culminate in the metaphysical questions of identity, difference, analogy, embraced within the luminous beauty of love.

PART TWO: Face-to-face with Nature

I.

In trying to balance substantiality with relationality, substantive entities with an interconnected web, some ecologists turned to the person. A number of eco-philosophers found the phenomenological work of Emmanuel Levinas on “face-to-face” encounters a rich source for thinking about the relation between persons and the things of nature. Levinas wrote about the face as an “irreducible singularity” of the Other who cannot be captured as an object; at the same time, the encounter with the Other engenders a responsibility toward him or her.[xviii] Although for Levinas the face was strictly human, eco-philosophers, following Heidegger, began to conceive of the world not as an object of utility but as the place of a contemplative “letting be” and “solicitude;” by seeing a face in nature, they hoped to enlarge the circle of responsibility

and care.

Ecologist Edward Casey finds the equivalent of a face in the environment in the *surfaces* of the landscape (including seascapes, cityscapes, etc.) upon which our glance falls. Like faces, he says, surfaces are capable of an expressivity that may reveal to the human glance “a direct presentation of environmental distress,” [xix] as illness can be seen instantly by a practiced doctor diagnosing a patient. The glance, he says, provides direct access to the other, including the less manifest aspects, leading to a “dialectic of engagement” significant for ethical action. [xx] “A glance suffices” to make us aware that we are “subject to [the] call to responsible action.” [xxi] And so “if there is indeed an ethical relationship between human beings, there is also an equally (but differently) ethical relation among all members of the natural environment.” [xxii]

From a “bare glance” at a clear-cut mountaintop—one from which all the trees had been removed for timber—Casey “sensed the rightness of concerted legal action...the imperative for ecological action stemmed from the intensity of the scene itself.” [xxiii] We may be indifferent, acting from self-interest, or have a “massive cultural disconnect” in which our glance just bounces off things, but the suffering of the environment is as plain as a nose on a face; even if we are not aware of any ethical imperatives, if we “miss the message,” we “still stand under the imperative to be responsible.” [xxiv]

Speaking of a “face” in nature is enlightening and certainly an advance over seeing nature as a mechanism, but without going deeper there is also something problematic about it. Though Casey speaks of a phenomenological intuition as a first moment of ethical engagement before anything is said, [xxv] and says that the glance “exercises its penetrating power, its ability to go under the manifest phenomenon—yet without any interpretive activity on my part,” [xxvi] it seems there is already a great deal of interpretation going on. If a “glance suffices... to see distress and disorder,” [xxvii] there is an assumption that the person doing the glancing already knows what would constitute a *right* order. What is the basis of that order, and of our knowledge of it?

A different but related issue concerns another “massive cultural disconnect,” one that we find noted throughout *Laudato si*. The Pope points to the common phenomenon of environmentalists repeatedly denying the same considerations to human life that they demand for nature (some of these inconsistencies are found in *LS*, 90, 91, 120, and 136). What if, for example, the “the unborn” were substituted for “the environment”? Does our glance bounce off the surface? Are those “oblivious” to the moral imperative to preserve innocent life still “under its sway”? [xxviii] Casey says that the clear-cut forest “compelled attention” by “the ugly access roads that criss-crossed the landscape like so many razor slashes” which “appalled and angered” him. [xxix] Of course, Casey is arguing for the extension of ethical responsibility to the environment, not disallowing it to persons, but the question remains for environmentalists:

are the “razor slashes” of abortion as appalling?

We are still involved in abstractions, however. If the thought to abort my child never crosses the threshold of my mind, it is not primarily due to an emotional reaction, or to engagement with an ethical imperative (“Do not take innocent life”), or to an intuition without a source, but to love. The face-to-face encounter is “not yet” (“I don’t know what your face looks like but I love it already”) but will soon blossom into the smile of a mother for a precious and particular human face. One’s response to clear-cutting mountains is likely to have a similar impetus: “People exploit what they have merely concluded to be of value, but they defend what they love.”^[xxx] Love here is not a subjective feeling but something ordering, overflowing, and generous, a splendor that draws us in as it flows from the face of infinite beauty. We turn now to a deeper encounter with the face of nature.

II.

Robert Spaemann agrees that the anthropocentrism of the technological mindset has no interest in the intrinsic truth, reality, or meaning of the things of nature, and “has increased human domination of nature to an extent thus far undreamt of.”^[xxxii] He also agrees that biocentrism abolishes the person as having any “difference” from nature, and forces us into a position in which “the human perspective on what it means to be human is now deemed unscientific.”^[xxxiii] Like Casey, he speaks specifically of “face to face encounters”^[xxxiiii] as engendering responsibility because of “the demand reality places on us,”^[xxxv] but differs profoundly from Casey in that what arises from ourselves is only one side of a paradoxical situation. True responsibility demands that we be open to reality as self-being—fully and truly other—but we ourselves are not the ground of such perception. Benevolent love *precedes* our own perceptions and grounds all moral imperatives, and does so as a gift from outside ourselves.^[xxxvi] We will return to this later.

Laudato si exhorts us to “remain constantly open to reality in all its inexhaustible richness” (note 141). Spaemann agrees, expanding Kant’s statement that persons may never be merely means: “nothing real ought to be reduced to status of mere means for an individual goal.”^[xxxvii] Beyond the expressiveness of the face is the reality of the whole person, and rather than simply speaking of a face in nature, Spaemann speaks of *anthropomorphism*. He defines this in a specific way, and carefully distinguishes it from an *anthropocentrism* in which we manipulate objective data that have nothing in common with us (or whose commonality is irrelevant to our interests).^[xxxviii] Though there is a real distinction, a dissimilarity—in fact a vast gulf—between natural creatures and persons, we need not speak of them as entirely different, by equivocation of terms. There is also a positive likeness or continuity via analogy (an ever-greater difference within a unity) between natural creatures and persons, in that the former follow the ontological “shape” (*morphos*) derived from persons “anthropo-morphically.” That means sharing with ourselves in 1) reality; 2) subjectivity (insofar as they have the capacity to enter into intrinsic relations and “universal communion” with others as subjects, not merely

as objects to be manipulated); and 3) interiority (as for example, the complex, unfathomable depth of being illuminated by Aquinas).

Though we cannot fully know what it is like to be an animal—animals evince an “ontological hiddenness” that remains a riddle to us—we can see by analogy that “when we predicate the words ‘suffering’ and ‘joy’ of other animals, these are not bare equivocations. They give a firmer purchase to our understanding of those creatures’ situations than any other words could.”^[xxxviii] The vast gulf remains—animals are not self-transcendent, they do not reflect on their world’s meaning, and for us to even recognize their inwardness is always an act of freedom—but in this way, without committing the “anthropomorphic/pathetic fallacy,” animals are neither reduced to Cartesian machines nor absorbed into the flow of phenomena.

What about the non-sentient entities of Casey’s landscapes? Both Pope Francis and Spaemann remind us of St. Francis, who “speaks of brothers and sisters when he talks to the elements.”^[xxxix] Is their reality merely “objective,” being “ready to hand” for our use, as Heidegger put it? No, even here, beings can best be understood analogically:

To think of an object of our experience as being also independent of this experience, as being in itself, means to think of it as analogous to the living, so that it is not constituted by the momentary perceptions which I have of it, but gathers together various states and happenings in a unity of identity with itself...the only alternative appears to me to consist in denying the inanimate anything like reality and identity; conceiving it instead as a kind of potentiality for perception by which it first becomes real.[xl]

A world in which things are nothing but a potentiality for my perception is a solipsistic world, and “solipsism excludes the possibility of love and justice.”^[xli] Spaemann’s notion of anthropomorphism is complex and nuanced, with wide repercussions in many areas. It demands a better explication than can be given here, and can only be fully understood in the context of his entire philosophy. But in brief, anthropomorphism properly understood is the reversal of a reductionism that would systematically reduce conscious beings to biology and then to physics, and non-conscious beings to things with no purpose other than human utility; the reversal returns to *all* beings their intrinsic goodness, meaning and value. There is no other alternative to anthropomorphism, Spaemann says; we cannot detach from analogy between the world and ourselves without “smuggling in” that analogy, and if we disregard the special significance of the person, we lose that which makes it possible for us to respect nature. It is only when we see natural entities as in some sense *ontologically* analogous with ourselves that they are preserved in their full integrity, and there can be true “universal communion.”

III.

Both Casey and Spaemann seek to overcome modernity's opposition between human beings and other entities, and to reveal the source of ethical responsibility. However, the differences between their launching points and subsequent trajectory are profound. Casey says that if "the face is no longer human in its primary significance" we "sidestep the problem of anthropocentrism." Sidestepping does not get at the root of the problem but merely postpones it; eventually it will return when deeper questions arise. According to Spaemann, both the original push and pull between the various dualisms and the postmodern eco-philosophical attempts to dialectically resolve them reflect certain philosophical presuppositions, among them an insurmountable gap between nature and freedom and the rejection of final causes (natural teleology). Nature and freedom are not at odds; as Cardinal Scola put it, nature "is not only a set of things but also of meanings through which human freedom is *called on* to realize its own original vocation in the search for the face of the Creator."^[xlii] For Spaemann (and Pope Francis), it is not enough to acknowledge our natural relationship to natural entities. More fundamentally, both relationship with and responsibility for those entities rests within a relational ontology at odds with ecological relationality, an ontology in which "all of reality is to be thought of "...teleologically."^[xliii]

The greatest difference between the two face-to-face encounters concerns the meaning and source of compassion, and the meaning of the other for whom that compassion is felt. Casey's "glance" purports to see into the hidden depths where suffering (e.g. environmental degradation) is revealed, but this still appears to be a literally superficial—on the surface—vision, for it does not reach to the meaning. How does one distinguish between unavoidable, temporary, or perhaps senseless suffering, and suffering for a greater purpose, such as sacrifice?

And what of the *reality of the other himself*, the one who is suffering? The sufferer disappears in both the modern tradition (where, according to Spaemann and others, it is not the sufferer that has reality, but the state of suffering;^[xliv] hence, for example, the push for euthanasia) as well as in the Buddhist compassion of "Deep Ecology" discussed above (which, as Spaemann says, is based on a *lack* of reality: "I myself am as unreal as the other is to me"^[xlv]). The eco-phenomenological attempt to reach the "real reality" of the other is also deficient. For Spaemann, "the openness to reality that is perfectly adequate to it is called love."^[xlvi] Spaemann's "benevolent love" is the desire for the other's best good: "*Delectatio in felicitate alterius* [Joy in the happiness of others] —this formula of Leibniz overcomes the opposition between anthropocentrism and love of nature 'for its own sake.'^[xlvii] The love is not merely self-generating. This is the final and fatal rupture between Casey and Spaemann. It is not simply a phenomenological intuition that initiates compassion, responsibility or anything else; it is something whose center is outside ourselves, the love of God, that is "the fundamental motive of all morality,"^[xlviii] and morality is only "one of [the] forms of appearance"^[xlix] of this greatest of gifts.

A wide-ranging study of Spaemann's contributions to human and natural ecology begs to be written.^[1] At this point we barely even touched upon what direction such a study might take. At the very least we can say that his work does not issue forth in another permutation of the Hegelian dialectic, an attempt to synthesize various dichotomies that ends by reproducing them on another level. The anthropocentrism/biocentrism duality was repudiated by both Catholics and many ecologists as the reductive displacement of deeper issues, but the question of the relation between the person and nature remains. Spaemann's turn to love means it can only be resolved dramatically, in analogy to the relation of God and the world.

PART THREE: Face-to-face with the Creator

"Integral Ecology" may not be a very poetic or soul-stirring term, and there can be many disagreements about its implementation, but its *meaning* is revealed in the last chapter of *Laudato si*, which presents Pope Francis's vision of the foundational face-to-face-encounter: "At the end, we will find ourselves face to face with the infinite beauty of God" (LS 243). Benedict XVI said that Dante's final beatific vision completed Aristotle's philosophical notion of *eros* as a moving force and so revealed "the continuity between Christian faith in God and the search developed by reason," but he continued that "a novelty appears that surpasses all human research... the novelty of a love that moved God to take on a human face."^[li]

The face is not simply an expressive surface. What then is its meaning? We began with the Pope's reflections on Guardini, and to Guardini we return. David L. Schindler responds to Guardini's comment that "in the experience of a great love, all that happens becomes an event inside that love" with the example of a mother preparing a meal for her child. The material elements of that preparation, even the space, time, and motion involved, are not neutral, manipulated instruments of her will, but the intrinsic features of her love, revelatory of her face, that is, *who she is*. "What I am proposing," says Schindler,

is that this holds true, by way of analogy, for the entire cosmic order in its relation to God: everylast bit of cosmic-cultural space, time, matter, and motion reveals—is destined to reveal—the face, the form, of God: the order of the event of God's great act of creative love. Beauty, then, is the proper term for the order proper to what is given by God. Beauty is cosmic order understood as gift.^[lii]

The world does not explain or account for itself; it "can only be understood as a gift from the outstretched hand of the Father of all, and as a reality illuminated by the love which calls us together into universal communion" (LS, 76). This is the face of God, the heart of Integral Ecology. Nature properly understood is a mystery intrinsically open to God; if nature itself "presents us with a face here," as some ecologists would have it, it is "only because it is at the same time disclosed as being turned radically and ecstatically toward a distance unto which all

the resonance of that life is directed, and from which that life is itself derived,”^[liii] that is, toward the face of the Giver. God is infinitely distant because His being radically transcends all natural being as its origin; at the same time, He is closer to us, more radically immanent than the most pantheistic “Gaia” ecologist might demand, present in each moment, in each particular^[liv] (without, of course, the pantheist’s dissolving of God into the things of the world). God’s being is coextensive with His love, which both “permeates and transcends all that is.”^[lv] His face reveals who He is and reconciles the metaphysical and the personal, the philosophy of being and the phenomenology of love.

Everything created is a gift of the Father, and so—Giver, Creator, and Father all being relationally ordering, rather than independently neutral, terms—persons and natural entities are *already* in an ontological relationship—in Integral Ecology’s “universal communion” — structured by a reciprocal, mutual self-giving that echoes the inter-personal love of the Trinity. Unlike the biocentric field that dissolves beings into transitory perturbations, there is the clear distinction of persons united by love; and unlike the anthropocentric stance, “we do not understand our superiority as a reason for personal glory or irresponsible dominion, but rather as a different capacity which, in its turn, entails a serious responsibility stemming from our faith” (LS, 220).

But there is more. Benedict XVI continued the above quote by saying that love moved God to take on not only a human face, but “even to take on flesh and blood, the entire human being.”^[lvi] In “The Gaze of Jesus,” (LS, 96–100) Pope Francis turns our attention to the mystery of the risen Lord, the One who “entered into the created cosmos” to reconcile all things to Himself, and he echoes Benedict XVI’s reference to First Corinthians and the “transfiguration of the entire world, to the point where God will be all in all.”^[lvii] Francis concludes:

Thus, the creatures of this world no longer appear to us under merely natural guise because the risen One is mysteriously holding them to himself and directing them towards fullness as their end. The very flowers of the field and the birds which his human eyes contemplated and admired are now imbued with his radiant presence.

The contemplative gaze of Christ and “his radiant presence” is reminiscent of Hans Urs von Balthasar’s account of the “abiding contemplation,” the “infinite amazement, wonderment and gratitude” of the Child Jesus, whose gaze marvels at everything “from the tiniest flower to the boundless skies.”^[lviii] Christ is the unity behind the dichotomies that precedes, orders, and transforms them, revealed to us in a beauty that is the annunciation of a luminous and infinite mystery. The Incarnation—the express image of the face of God revealed in the beauty of the created order—makes the two-tier, dualistic view rightly rejected by ecologists in Part One a disfigurement of the Gospel (LS, 98).

Because he was “in constant touch with nature, lending it an attention full of fondness and wonder,” says the Pope, “the Lord was able to invite others to be attentive to the beauty that there is in the world”(LS, 97). If the whole created order is a gift revealing the love of God for His creation, as a meal reveals the love of a mother for her child, and Christ most fully expresses the human “shape” in relating most intimately to all of creation, then persons may, analogously, and by God’s invitation, relate to the natural order in a similar way.

This is not simply a theological point that can be left out of ecological thinking with no effect. Beauty, said Benedict XVI, leads to “a direct encounter with the daily reality of our lives ... transfiguring it.”^[lix] The answer to the reductive stance of modernity is found here; for Pope Francis, “the desire to create and contemplate beauty manages to overcome reductionism through a kind of salvation which occurs in beauty and in those who behold it” (LS, 112). Contemplation—the heart of the gaze of Christ—with its “dimension of receptivity and gratuity” is what protects human action from the dichotomy that the entire encyclical seeks to transcend: that of “empty activism” versus the “unfettered greed and sense of isolation which make us seek personal gain to the detriment of all else” (237). That said, Spaemann reminds us that there is an ambivalence in the ecological concept of the Heideggerian “contemplative letting be” mentioned above:

The turn to a holistic contemplation of our reality nevertheless contains a very different possibility....instead of a new attitude of respect and letting be, we find in response to the contemporary situation the notion of an ever more comprehensive plan, a total mastery of the world, which attempts to take in hand even all side effects.[lx]

This is not hypothetical. Ecologist David Wood’s solution to environmental degradation is a world in which ecocentric “elected dictatorships” take control: “the argument that there are circumstances in which democratic societies might suspend democracy is not as totalitarian as it might seem.”^[lxi] Without benevolent love, what we have is a simulacrum of contemplation.

If “an integral ecology includes taking time to...contemplat[e] the Creator ... whose presence must not be contrived but found, uncovered” (LS, 225), then the summit of true contemplation is His presence in the Eucharist, a “source of motivation for our concerns for the environment” (236), and with the Eucharist we close. Quoting Benedict XVI, Pope Francis says:

In the Eucharist, fullness is already achieved; it is the living centre of the universe, the overflowing core of love and of inexhaustible life. Joined to the incarnate Son, present in the Eucharist, the whole cosmos gives thanks to God....The Eucharist joins heaven and earth; it embraces and

penetrates all creation. The world which came forth from God's hands returns to him in blessed and undivided adoration: in the bread of the Eucharist, "creation is projected towards divinization, towards the holy wedding feast, towards unification with the Creator himself."

[i] John Paul II, "Address to the Conference on Environment and Health," March 24, 1997.

[ii] Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI), *Dogma and Preaching* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011), 386.

[iii] John Paul II in *Dives in Misericordia* said that anthropocentrism and theocentrism were linked in Christ, but he was not using the former term in the way Pope Francis is here. Rather, he was referring to the mission of the Church, which must be "for man" yet always within the greater light of being "for God."

[iv] "Una bestiale occasione persa." Author's translation from the Italian.

[v] White, Lynn, Jr. "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis." *Science* 155, no. 3767 (March 10, 1967), 1203–1207. Some anthologies mistakenly reference this as "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis."

[vi] See the dismissal of Christianity after Lynn White in Paul Taylor, "The Ethics of Respect for Nature" in *Environmental Ethics*, ed. A. Light and H. Rolston (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003).

[vii] In a seeming affinity with the Pope, White calls for St. Francis to be the patron saint of a new, "alternative" Christianity, one supposedly more like Christianity's apparent "mirror image," Zen. But in his revisionist history White "reads back" modernist political terms into a culture in which they have no part: St. Francis, of whom he approves, can only be a "radical" with "left-wing followers." He misunderstands the early history of the Franciscans, and is blind to the fact that Francis was quite "radical" in his obedience to the Church. Far from being way out of the mainstream of religious belief, and far from having invented the idea of the elements praising nature, St. Francis, as Stratford Caldecott points out, may have given "the expression of a new outburst of spiritual feeling for nature, but it is in strictest continuity with many parts of the Christian and Hebrew tradition,"[vii] including the Canticle of Daniel, calling on all creation to bless the Lord, through the Psalms; they "may have not had (or needed) the term *ecology*, but the ancient writers were deeply aware of the interrelatedness of the natural world" (*Beauty for Truth's Sake: On the Re-Enchantment of Education* [Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009], 107).

[viii] Ben A. Minteer and Robert E. Manning. "An Appraisal of the Critique of Anthropocentrism and Three Lesser Known Themes in Lynn White's 'The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis.'" *Organization Environment* 2005; 18.163. P. 171.

[ix] White, 1205.

[x] See note 47.

[xi] Erazim Kohák, *The Embers and The Stars: A Philosophical Inquiry into the Moral Sense of Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 182.

[xii] Max Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness: from Prehistory to the Age of Ecology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 346.

[xiii] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2007), Chapter 6.

[xiv] Robert Barron, *The Priority of Christ: Toward a Postliberal Catholicism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 14.

[xv] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Ia, 96.2.

[xvi] D. C. Schindler and Jeanne Heffernan Schindler, eds. "In Defense of Anthropomorphism." *A Robert Spaemann Reader: Philosophical Essays on Nature, God, and the Human Person* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 88.

[xvii] Romand Coles, "Ecotones and Environmental Ethics," in *In the Nature of Things: Language, Politics, and the Environment* (Minneapolis, MI: University of Minneapolis Press, 1993), 228, 244.

[xviii] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991). In "Is Ontology Fundamental?" Levinas asked whether things could have a "face," and answered his own question by saying that "the analysis given so far is not enough to give the answer." This appeared to be an opening to some to extend the "face" to nature. *Basic Philosophical Writings*, eds. A. Perperzak, S. Critchley, and R. Bernasconi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 10. Christian Diehm is one ecophilosopher who extended the concept of a vulnerable face, to which we are responsible, to the nonhuman ("Natural Disasters," in *Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself*, 171–85); Matthew Calarco also sees in animals the equivalent of a face ("Faced by Animals," in *Radicalizing Levinas* [Albany: SUNY Press, 2010], 113–33.)

[xix] Casey, Edward S. "Taking a Glance at the Environment," in *Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself* (eds.

Charles S. Brown and Ted Toadvine [Albany: SUNY Press, 2003], 196–97).

[xx] Casey, 47.

[xxi] Casey, 198, 204.

[xxii] Casey, 205.

[xxiii] Casey, 199.

[xxiv] Casey, 205.

[xxv] Casey, 203.

[xxvi] Casey, 188.

[xxvii] Casey, 201.

[xxviii] Casey, 205.

[xxix] Casey, 199–200.

[xxx] Wendell Berry, *Life is A Miracle: An Essay Against Modern Superstition* (Washington DC: Counterpoint Press, 2000), 41.

[xxxii] “Human Dignity,” *Essays in Anthropology: Variations on a Theme* (Trans. Guido de Graaff and James Mumford [Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010], 69).

[xxxiii] Ibid.

[xxxiiii] *Happiness and Benevolence* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2000), 179.

[xxxv] *Happiness and Benevolence*, 173. Regarding non-human life, Spaemann distinguishes those “for whom” from those “to whom” we have responsibility.

[xxxvi] Ibid.

[xxxvii] *Happiness and Benevolence*, 177.

[xxxviii] *A Robert Spaemann Reader*, 86.

[xxxix] *Persons: The Difference Between “Someone” and “Something”* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 125.

[xl] *A Robert Spaemann Reader*, 91.

[xl] *Happiness and Benevolence*, 101.

[xli] *A Robert Spaemann Reader*, 85.

[xlii] Angelo Cardinal Scola, “Protecting Nature or Saving Creation? Ecological Conflicts and Religious Passions.” *Dialoghi di San Giorgio Inaugural Event*, Venice, 13 September 2010. Emphasis added.

[xliii] *Happiness and Benevolence*, 101. Spaemann’s view of “natural teleology” is perhaps the most central key to his philosophy of nature, but cannot be given its full due here.

[xliv] *A Robert Spaemann Reader*, 89.

[xlv] *Happiness and Benevolence*, 103.

[xlvi] *The Robert Spaemann Reader*, 90.

[xlvii] *Happiness and Benevolence*, 118. “For its own sake” refers to its “intrinsic value” in the biocentric sense, that is, in opposition to anthropocentric instrumental value. Though the phrase “intrinsic value” of course has real meaning in religious discourse, it is used as catchphrase of ecological holism to highlight its rejection of anthropocentrism.

[xlviii] *Happiness and Benevolence*, 77.

[xlix] *Happiness and Benevolence*, 79.

[l] Spaemann agrees with the three recent popes that the human and natural stand and fall together: movements against the degradation of natural species and for human dignity are both “countermovements” against a “despotic-aggressive form of the mastery of nature” that issues forth in everything from the wiping out of species to the legalization of abortion. He also agrees on the damage done by the loss of the notion of creation, and the awareness of the fallen nature of persons due to original sin.

[li] “Address to the Participants of the Meeting Promoted by the Pontifical Council Cor Unum,” 23 January 2006.

[lii] “Religion and Secularity in a Culture of Abstraction: On the Integrity of Space, Time, Matter, and Motion,” *The Strange New World of the Gospel: Re-Evangelizing in the Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 52–53.

[liii] Bruce V. Foltz, “Nature’s Other Side: The Demise of Nature and the Phenomenology of Givenness,” in

Rethinking Nature: Essays in Environmental Philosophy, Eds. Bruce V. Foltz and Robert Frodeman (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 334.

[liv] See Aquinas, *S. Th.* I, q. 8, a. 1.

[lv] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Unless You Become Like This Child* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 46.

[lvi] Cor Unum.

[lvii] Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 11.

[lviii] Von Balthasar, 45–46.

[lix] Meeting with Artists, 21 November 2007.

[lx] *A Robert Spaemann Reader*, 224. Neil Evernden said, “Ironically, the environmentalists’ vision of a unified planet, symbolized by images of Earth as seen from outer space, only helps legitimate the quest for control in the guise of ‘global management.’ If what is at stake is the fate of the planet, then any intervention seems justified. Thus, rather than diminish the appetite for dominance of the natural world, the environmental crisis has served to sanction virtually any activity which embraces the cause of planetary survival.” *The Natural Alien* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 149.

[lxi] David Wood, “What is Eco-Phenomenology?,” in *Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself*, eds. Charles S. Brown and Ted Toadvine (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 231.