



# Integral Ecology: At Home in the World

2016 - ISSUE ONE





# Contents

2016 - ISSUE ONE—INTEGRAL ECOLOGY: AT HOME IN THE WORLD

	<i>Page</i>
<b>RE-SOURCE: CLASSIC TEXTS</b>	
POPE BENEDICT XVI — If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation .....	3
STRATFORD CALDECOTT — The Rise of the Machines .....	10
<b>EDITORIAL</b>	
LÉONIE CALDECOTT — Towards an Integral Ecology .....	24
<b>FEATURE ARTICLES</b>	
MARY TAYLOR — Integral Ecology: “Face-to-Face with the Infinite Beauty of God” .....	26
CATHERINE PAKALUK — Human Population and the Natural Environment: Old Questions, New Answers .....	39
SOPHIE CALDECOTT — A Better Deal: Sustainable Trading .....	46
<b>WITNESS</b>	
MICHAEL GALDO — Thanks Be to God .....	50
<b>BOOK REVIEWS</b>	
ALEXANDER BINDER — Bigger is Not Always Better .....	52
CARLA GALDO — Poverty and the Simple Life .....	55
JOHN LARACY — The Global and the Local .....	57
MARGARET HARPER MCCARTHY — On Minimalism: Is the “Bare Minimum” Essential Enough? .....	60

# If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation

POPE BENEDICT XVI

*This message of his Holiness Benedict XVI for the celebration of the World Day of Peace, 1 January 2010, is also available on the [Vatican website](#).*

1. At the beginning of this New Year, I wish to offer heartfelt greetings of peace to all Christian communities, international leaders, and people of good will throughout the world. For this XLIII World Day of Peace I have chosen the theme: *If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation*. Respect for creation is of immense consequence, not least because “creation is the beginning and the foundation of all God’s works,”<sup>[i]</sup> and its preservation has now become essential for the pacific coexistence of mankind. Man’s inhumanity to man has given rise to numerous threats to peace and to authentic and integral human development—wars, international and regional conflicts, acts of terrorism, and violations of human rights. Yet no less troubling are the threats arising from the neglect—if not downright misuse—of the earth and the natural goods that God has given us. For this reason, it is imperative that mankind renew and strengthen “that covenant between human beings and the environment, which should mirror the creative love of God, from whom we come and towards whom we are journeying.”<sup>[ii]</sup>

2. In my Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, I noted that integral human development is closely linked to the obligations which flow from *man’s relationship with the natural environment*. The environment must be seen as God’s gift to all people, and the use we make of it entails a shared responsibility for all humanity, especially the poor and future generations. I also observed that whenever nature, and human beings in particular, are seen merely as products of chance or an evolutionary determinism, our overall sense of responsibility wanes.<sup>[iii]</sup> On the other hand, seeing creation as God’s gift to humanity helps us understand our vocation and worth as human beings. With the Psalmist, we can exclaim with wonder: “When I look at your heavens, the work of your hands, the moon and the stars which you have established; what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?” (Ps 8:4-5). Contemplating the beauty of creation inspires us to recognize the love of the Creator, that Love which “moves the sun and the other stars.”<sup>[iv]</sup>

3. Twenty years ago, Pope John Paul II devoted his *Message for the World Day of Peace* to the theme: *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation*. He emphasized our relationship, as God’s creatures, with the universe all around us. “In our day,” he wrote, “there is a growing awareness that world peace is threatened ... also by a lack of *due respect for nature*.” He added that “*ecological awareness*, rather than being downplayed, needs to be helped to develop and mature, and find fitting expression in concrete programmes and initiatives.”<sup>[v]</sup> Previous Popes had spoken of the relationship between human beings and the environment. In 1971, for example, on the eightieth anniversary of Leo XIII’s Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, Paul VI pointed out that “by an ill-considered exploitation of nature (man) risks destroying it and becoming in his turn the victim of this degradation.” He added that “not only is the material environment becoming a permanent menace—pollution and refuse, new illnesses and absolute destructive capacity—but the human framework is no longer under man’s control, thus

creating an environment for tomorrow which may well be intolerable. This is a wide-ranging social problem which concerns the entire human family.”<sup>[vi]</sup>

4. Without entering into the merit of specific technical solutions, the Church is nonetheless concerned, as an “expert in humanity,” to call attention to the relationship between the Creator, human beings and the created order. In 1990 John Paul II had spoken of an “ecological crisis” and, in highlighting its primarily ethical character, pointed to the “urgent moral need for a new solidarity.”<sup>[vii]</sup> His appeal is all the more pressing today, in the face of signs of a growing crisis which it would be irresponsible not to take seriously. Can we remain indifferent before the problems associated with such realities as climate change, desertification, the deterioration and loss of productivity in vast agricultural areas, the pollution of rivers and aquifers, the loss of biodiversity, the increase of natural catastrophes and the deforestation of equatorial and tropical regions? Can we disregard the growing phenomenon of “environmental refugees,” people who are forced by the degradation of their natural habitat to forsake it—and often their possessions as well—in order to face the dangers and uncertainties of forced displacement? Can we remain impassive in the face of actual and potential conflicts involving access to natural resources? All these are issues with a profound impact on the exercise of human rights, such as the right to life, food, health and development.

5. It should be evident that the ecological crisis cannot be viewed in isolation from other related questions, since it is closely linked to the notion of development itself and our understanding of man in his relationship to others and to the rest of creation. Prudence would thus dictate a *profound, long-term review of our model of development*, one which would take into consideration the meaning of the economy and its goals with an eye to correcting its malfunctions and misapplications. The ecological health of the planet calls for this, but it is also demanded by the cultural and moral crisis of humanity whose symptoms have for some time been evident in every part of the world.<sup>[viii]</sup> Humanity needs a *profound cultural renewal*; it needs to *rediscover those values which can serve as the solid basis for building a brighter future for all*. Our present crises—be they economic, food-related, environmental or social—are ultimately also moral crises, and all of them are interrelated. They require us to rethink the path which we are travelling together. Specifically, they call for a lifestyle marked by sobriety and solidarity, with new rules and forms of engagement, one which focuses confidently and courageously on strategies that actually work, while decisively rejecting those that have failed. Only in this way can the current crisis become an *opportunity for discernment and new strategic planning*.

6. Is it not true that what we call “nature” in a cosmic sense has its origin in “a plan of love and truth”? The world “is not the product of any necessity whatsoever, nor of blind fate or chance... The world proceeds from the free will of God; he wanted to make his creatures share in his being, in his intelligence, and in his goodness.”<sup>[ix]</sup> The *Book of Genesis*, in its very first pages, points to the wise design of the cosmos: it comes forth from God’s mind and finds its culmination in man and woman, made in the image and likeness of the Creator to “fill the earth” and to “have dominion over” it as “stewards” of God himself (cf. Gen 1:28). The harmony between the Creator, mankind and the created world, as described by Sacred Scripture, was disrupted by the sin of Adam and Eve, by man and woman, who wanted to take the place of God and refused to acknowledge that they were his creatures. As a result, the work of “exercising dominion” over the earth, “tilling it and keeping it,” was also disrupted, and conflict arose within and between mankind and the rest of creation (cf. Gen 3:17–19). Human beings let themselves be mastered by selfishness; they misunderstood the meaning of God’s command and exploited creation out of a desire to exercise absolute domination over it. But the true meaning of God’s original command, as the *Book of Genesis* clearly shows, was not a simple conferral of authority, but rather a summons to responsibility. The wisdom of the ancients had recognized that nature is not at our disposal as “a heap of scattered refuse.”<sup>[x]</sup> Biblical Revelation made us see that

nature is a gift of the Creator, who gave it an inbuilt order and enabled man to draw from it the principles needed to “till it and keep it” (cf. Gen. 2:15).[xi] Everything that exists belongs to God, who has entrusted it to man, albeit not for his arbitrary use. Once man, instead of acting as God’s co-worker, sets himself up in place of God, he ends up provoking a rebellion on the part of nature, “which is more tyrannized than governed by him.”[xii] Man thus has a duty to exercise responsible stewardship over creation, to care for it and to cultivate it.[xiii]

7. Sad to say, it is all too evident that large numbers of people in different countries and areas of our planet are experiencing increased hardship because of the negligence or refusal of many others to exercise responsible stewardship over the environment. The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council reminded us that “God has destined the earth and everything it contains for all peoples and nations.”[xiv] The goods of creation belong to humanity as a whole. Yet the current pace of environmental exploitation is seriously endangering the supply of certain natural resources not only for the present generation, but above all for generations yet to come.[xv] It is not hard to see that environmental degradation is often due to the lack of far-sighted official policies or to the pursuit of myopic economic interests, which then, tragically, become a serious threat to creation. To combat this phenomenon, economic activity needs to consider the fact that “every economic decision has a moral consequence”[xvi] and thus show increased respect for the environment. When making use of natural resources, we should be concerned for their protection and consider the cost entailed—environmentally and socially—as an essential part of the overall expenses incurred. The international community and national governments are responsible for sending the right signals in order to combat effectively the misuse of the environment. To protect the environment, and to safeguard natural resources and the climate, there is a need to act in accordance with clearly-defined rules, also from the juridical and economic standpoint, while at the same time taking into due account the solidarity we owe to those living in the poorer areas of our world and to future generations.

8. *A greater sense of intergenerational solidarity* is urgently needed. Future generations cannot be saddled with the cost of our use of common environmental resources. “We have inherited from past generations, and we have benefited from the work of our contemporaries; for this reason we have obligations towards all, and we cannot refuse to interest ourselves in those who will come after us, to enlarge the human family. Universal solidarity represents a benefit as well as a duty. *This is a responsibility that present generations have towards those of the future*, a responsibility that also concerns individual States and the international community.”[xvii] Natural resources should be used in such a way that immediate benefits do not have a negative impact on living creatures, human and not, present and future; that the protection of private property does not conflict with the universal destination of goods;[xviii] that human activity does not compromise the fruitfulness of the earth, for the benefit of people now and in the future. In addition to a fairer sense of intergenerational solidarity there is also an urgent moral need for a renewed sense of *intragenerational solidarity*, especially in relationships between developing countries and highly industrialized countries: “the international community has an urgent duty to find institutional means of regulating the exploitation of non-renewable resources, involving poor countries in the process, in order to plan together for the future.”[xix] *The ecological crisis shows the urgency of a solidarity which embraces time and space*. It is important to acknowledge that among the causes of the present ecological crisis is the historical responsibility of the industrialized countries. Yet the less developed countries, and emerging countries in particular, are not exempt from their own responsibilities with regard to creation, for the duty of gradually adopting effective environmental measures and policies is incumbent upon all. This would be accomplished more easily if self-interest played a lesser role in the granting of aid and the sharing of knowledge and cleaner technologies.

9. To be sure, among the basic problems which the international community has to address is that of energy resources and the development of joint and sustainable strategies to satisfy the energy needs of the present and future generations. This means that technologically advanced societies must be prepared to encourage more sober lifestyles, while reducing their energy consumption and improving its efficiency. At the same time there is a need to encourage research into, and utilization of, forms of energy with lower impact on the environment and “a world-wide redistribution of energy resources, so that countries lacking those resources can have access to them.”<sup>[xx]</sup> The ecological crisis offers an historic opportunity to develop a common plan of action aimed at orienting the model of global development towards greater respect for creation and for an integral human development inspired by the values proper to charity in truth. I would advocate the adoption of a model of development based on the centrality of the human person, on the promotion and sharing of the common good, on responsibility, on a realization of our need for a changed life-style, and on prudence, the virtue which tells us what needs to be done today in view of what might happen tomorrow.<sup>[xxi]</sup>

10. A sustainable comprehensive management of the environment and the resources of the planet demands that human intelligence be directed to technological and scientific research and its practical applications. The “new solidarity” for which John Paul II called in his *Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace*<sup>[xxii]</sup> and the “global solidarity” for which I myself appealed in my *Message for the 2009 World Day of Peace*<sup>[xxiii]</sup> are essential attitudes in shaping our efforts to protect creation through a better internationally-coordinated management of the earth’s resources, particularly today, when there is an increasingly clear link between combatting environmental degradation and promoting an integral human development. These two realities are inseparable, since “the integral development of individuals necessarily entails a joint effort for the development of humanity as a whole.”<sup>[xxiv]</sup> At present there are a number of scientific developments and innovative approaches which promise to provide satisfactory and balanced solutions to the problem of our relationship to the environment. Encouragement needs to be given, for example, to research into effective ways of exploiting the immense potential of solar energy. Similar attention also needs to be paid to the world-wide problem of water and to the global water cycle system, which is of prime importance for life on earth and whose stability could be seriously jeopardized by climate change. Suitable strategies for rural development centred on small farmers and their families should be explored, as well as the implementation of appropriate policies for the management of forests, for waste disposal and for strengthening the linkage between combatting climate change and overcoming poverty. Ambitious national policies are required, together with a necessary international commitment which will offer important benefits especially in the medium and long term. There is a need, in effect, to move beyond a purely consumerist mentality in order to promote forms of agricultural and industrial production capable of respecting creation and satisfying the primary needs of all. The ecological problem must be dealt with not only because of the chilling prospects of environmental degradation on the horizon; the real motivation must be the quest for authentic world-wide solidarity inspired by the values of charity, justice and the common good. For that matter, as I have stated elsewhere, “technology is never merely technology. It reveals man and his aspirations towards development; it expresses the inner tension that impels him gradually to overcome material limitations. *Technology in this sense is a response to God’s command to till and keep the land* (cf. Gen 2:15) that he has entrusted to humanity, and it must serve to reinforce the covenant between human beings and the environment, a covenant that should mirror God’s creative love.”<sup>[xxv]</sup>

11. It is becoming more and more evident that the issue of environmental degradation challenges us to examine our life-style and the prevailing models of consumption and production, which are often unsustainable from a social, environmental and even economic point of view. We can no longer do without a real change of outlook which will result in *new life-styles*, “in which the quest for truth,

beauty, goodness and communion with others for the sake of common growth are the factors which determine consumer choices, savings and investments.”<sup>[xxvi]</sup> Education for peace must increasingly begin with far-reaching decisions on the part of individuals, families, communities and states. We are all responsible for the protection and care of the environment. This responsibility knows no boundaries. In accordance with the *principle of subsidiarity* it is important for everyone to be committed at his or her proper level, working to overcome the prevalence of particular interests. A special role in raising awareness and in formation belongs to the different groups present in civil society and to the non-governmental organizations which work with determination and generosity for the spread of ecological responsibility, responsibility which should be ever more deeply anchored in respect for “human ecology.” The media also have a responsibility in this regard to offer positive and inspiring models. In a word, concern for the environment calls for a broad global vision of the world; a responsible common effort to move beyond approaches based on selfish nationalistic interests towards a vision constantly open to the needs of all peoples. We cannot remain indifferent to what is happening around us, for the deterioration of any one part of the planet affects us all. Relationships between individuals, social groups and states, like those between human beings and the environment, must be marked by respect and “charity in truth.” In this broader context one can only encourage the efforts of the international community to ensure progressive disarmament and a world free of nuclear weapons, whose presence alone threatens the life of the planet and the ongoing integral development of the present generation and of generations yet to come.

12. *The Church has a responsibility towards creation*, and she considers it her duty to exercise that responsibility in public life, in order to protect earth, water and air as gifts of God the Creator meant for everyone, and above all to save mankind from the danger of self-destruction. The degradation of nature is closely linked to the cultural models shaping human coexistence: consequently, “when ‘human ecology’ is respected within society, environmental ecology also benefits.”<sup>[xxvii]</sup> Young people cannot be asked to respect the environment if they are not helped, within families and society as a whole, to respect themselves. The book of nature is one and indivisible; it includes not only the environment but also individual, family and social ethics.<sup>[xxviii]</sup> Our duties towards the environment flow from our duties towards the person, considered both individually and in relation to others.

Hence I readily encourage efforts to promote a greater sense of ecological responsibility which, as I indicated in my Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, would safeguard an authentic “human ecology” and thus forcefully reaffirm the inviolability of human life at every stage and in every condition, the dignity of the person and the unique mission of the family, where one is trained in love of neighbour and respect for nature.<sup>[xxix]</sup> There is a need to safeguard the human patrimony of society. This patrimony of values originates in and is part of the natural moral law, which is the foundation of respect for the human person and creation.

13. Nor must we forget the very significant fact that many people experience peace and tranquility, renewal and reinvigoration, when they come into close contact with the beauty and harmony of nature. There exists a certain reciprocity: as we care for creation, we realize that God, through creation, cares for us. On the other hand, a correct understanding of the relationship between man and the environment will not end by absolutizing nature or by considering it more important than the human person. If the Church’s magisterium expresses grave misgivings about notions of the environment inspired by ecocentrism and biocentrism, it is because such notions eliminate the difference of identity and worth between the human person and other living things. In the name of a supposedly egalitarian vision of the “dignity” of all living creatures, such notions end up abolishing the distinctiveness and superior role of human beings. They also open the way to a new pantheism tinged with neo-paganism, which would see the source of man’s salvation in nature alone, understood in purely naturalistic terms.

The Church, for her part, is concerned that the question be approached in a balanced way, with respect for the “grammar” which the Creator has inscribed in his handiwork by giving man the role of a steward and administrator with responsibility over creation, a role which man must certainly not abuse, but also one which he may not abdicate. In the same way, the opposite position, which would absolutize technology and human power, results in a grave assault not only on nature, but also on human dignity itself.<sup>[xxx]</sup>

14. *If you want to cultivate peace, protect creation.* The quest for peace by people of good will surely would become easier if all acknowledge the indivisible relationship between God, human beings and the whole of creation. In the light of divine Revelation and in fidelity to the Church’s Tradition, Christians have their own contribution to make. They contemplate the cosmos and its marvels in light of the creative work of the Father and the redemptive work of Christ, who by his death and resurrection has reconciled with God “all things, whether on earth or in heaven” (Col 1:20). Christ, crucified and risen, has bestowed his Spirit of holiness upon mankind, to guide the course of history in anticipation of that day when, with the glorious return of the Saviour, there will be “new heavens and a new earth” (2 Pet 3:13), in which justice and peace will dwell for ever. Protecting the natural environment in order to build a world of peace is thus a duty incumbent upon each and all. It is an urgent challenge, one to be faced with renewed and concerted commitment; it is also a providential opportunity to hand down to coming generations the prospect of a better future for all. May this be clear to world leaders and to those at every level who are concerned for the future of humanity: the protection of creation and peacemaking are profoundly linked! For this reason, I invite all believers to raise a fervent prayer to God, the all-powerful Creator and the Father of mercies, so that all men and women may take to heart the urgent appeal: *If you want to cultivate peace, protect creation.*

*From the Vatican, 8 December 2009*

<sup>[i]</sup>Catechism of the Catholic Church, 198.

<sup>[ii]</sup>[Message for the 2008 World Day of Peace](#), 7.

<sup>[iii]</sup> Cf. no. 48.

<sup>[iv]</sup>The Divine Comedy, *Paradiso*, XXXIII, 145.

<sup>[v]</sup>[Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace](#), 1.

<sup>[vi]</sup>[Octogesima Adveniens](#), 21.

<sup>[vii]</sup>[Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace](#), 10.

<sup>[viii]</sup>[Caritas in Veritate](#), 32.

<sup>[ix]</sup>Catechism of the Catholic Church, 295.

<sup>[x]</sup> (c. 535–c. 475 B.C.), Fragment 22B124, in H. Diels and W. Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1952, 6th ed.).

- [xi] *Caritas in Veritate*, 48.
- [xii] *Centesimus Annus*, 37.
- [xiii] *Caritas in Veritate*, 50.
- [xiv] *Gaudium et Spes*, 69.
- [xv] *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 34.
- [xvi] *Caritas in Veritate*, 37.
- [xvii] *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 467; cf. Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, 17.
- [xviii] *Centesimus Annus*, 30–31, 43.
- [xix] *Caritas in Veritate*, 49.
- [xx]
- [xxi] S. Th., II-II, q. 49, 5.
- [xxii]
- [xxiii] Cf. No. 8.
- [xxiv] *Populorum Progressio*, 43.
- [xxv] *Caritas in Veritate*, 69.
- [xxvi] *Centesimus Annus*, 36.
- [xxvii] *Caritas in Veritate*, 51.
- [xxviii] *ibid.*, 15, 51.
- [xxix] *ibid.*, 28, 51, 61; John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 38, 39.
- [xxx] *Caritas in Veritate*, 70.

*Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI served as pope from 2005 to 2013.*

# The Rise of the Machines

STRATFORD CALDECOTT

The only sort of inner life allowed by the Technician would be a modest and moderate form of introspection, directed by the doctor and tending to produce an optimistic frame of mind by eliminating—by plucking out the very roots of—any desire that could not be fulfilled in this world. Fools! You don't care a tinker's curse for the inner life, yet it is nevertheless through the inner life and in it that certain real values have been transmitted to us without which liberty would be nothing but an empty word. You don't care a tinker's curse for the said values either? So be it.—Georges Bernanos [1]

When every landscape is bordered by roads or marched across by pylons, when every riverbed is strewn with plastic and metallic waste, when even the wildest environment is carefully managed by ecological experts for its own protection, we are sealed on every side by the artificial: by our own image projected onto nature. But the self turned in upon itself is living in a coffin, and a civilization that worships the self is what John Paul II termed a “culture of death.”

In such a culture, the real is what can be measured. Human life has no value but the going market rate, and if we animals have any purpose on earth it is to maximize our pleasure while prolonging our existence. We are here to consume—or to be entertained. As one pundit said, “We have moved from a world in which we define ourselves by work to one where we define ourselves—and, in many ways, discover our meaning—through consumption: leisure, expenditure on material goods and other things outside work.”[2]

That is as much as to say, we eat in McDonald's or Pizza Hut, we drink Coke or Pepsi, and we decorate our apartments with exquisite taste. Our range of choice among ice creams exceeds the wildest indulgent dreams of a Nero or Caligula. But apart from all that, we have no vocation, and no power to determine our destiny.

We have spawned this culture together. It comes from Europe, from divisions and hatreds created before America was a nation. The responsibility for it lies not with Americans but with Christians. In a sense you could say it was the fault of Christ. Faith in Jesus gave a radically new impetus to history. It disrupted the slow breathing, the cyclic rise and fall of civilizations that lived in an uneasy harmony with the forces of the cosmos, recognizing in nature a fixed and eternal wisdom. Christianity injected a brand new idea: that the Creator of all might have stepped through the magic mirror and into our world, becoming man. In so doing he gave to history a real center and a shape, a middle and an end.

It was Jesus who raised the stakes. We are now playing for eternal life. He brought a new freedom. In sacramental union—that is, in loving union—with him we can achieve a destiny higher than fate and change the course of nature. To quote Christopher Dawson again:

“Eternity had entered into time and henceforward the singular and the temporal had acquired an eternal significance. The closed circle of time had been broken and a ladder had been let down from heaven to earth, by which mankind can escape from the ‘sorrowful wheel’ which had cast its shadow over Greek and Indian thought, and go forward in newness of life to a new world.”[3]

The dynamism of the Christian faith created Western civilization, as historians like Dawson, Pierre Duhem, and Stanley Jaki have shown. But from the outset there was a flaw, a failure in the human response to the Incarnation. As the new civilization grew, that flaw was revealed ever more clearly. A jagged crack widened, engulfing both East and West, splitting nature from grace, so that Christendom was cut off from its very source of life. The worst, the old saying goes, is the corruption of the best. If that is so, then the culture of life corrupted is the culture of death. Cut off from the vine we can do less than nothing; severed from the One who alone can hold together the forces of grace and imagination released by the Incarnation we are in a worse state than ever the pagans were.

Let us trace it back, this jagged crack in the soul of Christendom, as near as we can to its earliest point. Three men are sleeping in a garden. Peter, James, and John could not keep awake, and so failed to pray with their Master. This much we know from the Gospel account. But what, exactly, would their prayers have achieved? Judas repented a little too late: perhaps he would have been saved if his brothers had reached out to him in prayer. Jesus died on the Cross; Jerusalem fell. Of course, individual Jews as well as Gentiles did convert, so that out of the wreckage of Israel and Rome a Christian Empire, a Christendom could arise. But already a deadly separation had opened up between the earthly and the heavenly city, which had been united on earth in the Body of Christ. If Jerusalem had become the center of the new faith, it might have drawn all nations and peoples to itself. Instead, the vengeful ghost of a monotheism never fully integrated with Christianity was able to emerge from the deserts of the South to become the scourge and the terror of Europe in the Middle Ages. The foundations of secular modernity were laid in the struggle with Islam, when the Christian crusaders, attempting to recapture the Holy City by force of arms, succeeded by their brutality, diverted towards Constantinople, only in sealing the division between Eastern and Western Christendom.

All through the subsequent fragmentation of Europe, the collapse of the economic and social framework of feudalism, the rise of the merchant classes and the nation state, “philosophic reason” advanced at the expense of the contemplative intellect. The Protestant Reformation destroyed the dream of a united Christendom in the West, and in the confusion the humanists of the Renaissance were able to forge a new unifying culture across the Catholic-Protestant divide by opening the way to a new paganism and secularization of knowledge. Hilaire Belloc once wrote that if it had not been for the Reformation, the energies of the Renaissance would have fueled a Golden Age. The colossal nudes of Michelangelo are certainly impressive, but in them we see that it is man rather than God who has begun to take center stage.

We are living in an era of voluntarism; a period in which religion has been dying because it has been reduced to an act of the will, and thought has been subordinated to sentiment. The conversion of culture that is called for is a profound one, because part of the problem of our culture is that religious faith is assumed by both believers and non-believers to be a purely human act. Of course, faith is an “infused theological virtue”, a divinely inspired habit, and to that extent certainly also a matter of the will. But the created human will has been misunderstood in modernity as primarily *active and generative*. The deepest Christian tradition, by contrast, understands the will as primarily *receptive*—and that means turned towards the truth. A will turned in upon itself, upon the self, cannot give thanks, cannot receive grace. Such a will can believe only with *blind faith*. What we must affirm, against the false Gnosticism of atheistic reason, against even the rules of the club of professional philosophers and theologians, is the reality of a *seeing faith*.

The first volume of Hans Urs von Balthasar’s series *The Glory of the Lord* is precisely a defense of this concept of *seeing faith*, and even of what we might call “Christian Gnosis” (following the great Alexandrians, Clement and Origen, rather than the heretics dubbed “Gnostics” by Irenaeus and

others).[4] I won't try to summarize it here, but simply acknowledge it as part of the background to this concluding section. The healing of our souls and of our society will only come with an *opening of vision*. But the vision we are talking about—the blossoming of the spiritual senses—depends on *purity*, or rather purity of heart, as we saw at the beginning. What I mean by purity is openness to truth. It has to do with being like a mirror, and we recall that a mirror is only able to reflect when it is turned outward. Folded in on itself it can see only reflections of reflections, and ultimately, locked in darkness, it sees nothing at all. The struggle for purity is thus the struggle for light, the struggle to let nothing get in the way of the light except things that the light wishes to reveal.

The conversion of culture, then, implies a *conversion to purity* in order to be able to see the truth. Yet we know the remarkable degree to which our culture dedicates its creative energy to the corruption of innocence and the pollution of the imagination. This is a culture dead set against asceticism. “Not for nothing does Holy Scripture name ‘concupiscence of the eyes’ among the three powers which constitute the world that ‘lieth in the power of evil (1 Jn 2:16; 5:19),” writes the Thomist philosopher Josef Pieper:

It reaches the extremes of its destructive and eradicating power when it builds itself a world according to its own image and likeness: when it surrounds itself with the restlessness of a perpetual moving picture of meaningless shows, and with the literally deafening noise of impressions and sensations breathlessly rushing past the windows of the senses. Behind the flimsy pomp of its facade dwells absolute nothingness; it is a world of, at most, ephemeral creations, which often within less than a quarter hour become stale and discarded, like a newspaper or magazine swiftly scanned or merely perused; a world which, to the piercing eye of the healthy mind untouched by its contagion, appears like the amusement quarter of a big city in the hard brightness of a winter morning: desperately bare, disconsolate and ghostly. The destructiveness of this disorder which originates from, and grows upon, obsessive addiction, lies in the fact that it stifles man's primitive power of perceiving reality; that it makes man incapable not only of coming to himself but also of reaching reality and truth.[5]

The stage is set, if this is true, for a titanic struggle. The errors of modernity are spiritually based, and will not be rooted out easily. But should we be surprised at this? The “Battle of the Logos” was foreseen in the Book of Revelation. The Battle is described in the most graphic way in the Book of Revelation (19:11-21), where the Word of God, clad in robes dipped in blood, rides out to war, his eyes like a flame of fire. “From his mouth issues a sharp sword with which to smite the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.” The Founder of Christianity, after all, is on record as saying he came not to bring peace but a sword (Mt 10:34-36). The sword is an instrument of division, of opposition. Sword implies Battle.

According to the reading of Hans Urs von Balthasar in the fourth volume of *Theo-Drama*, the Battle is made necessary by the sin that God must expose and even, in a sense, *deliberately provoke*, in order finally to overcome. “Christ's utter Yes to God and to the world,” he writes, “drives the utter No—the demonic, anti-Christian No—out of its hiding place. ‘If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin; ... but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father.’”[6] In the very act of gathering us to himself through history, Christ scatters his flock. In the act of bringing peace, he provokes war.

In a period of rapidly evolving technology and the social changes that inevitably flow from this, the “globalization of solidarity” (Pope John Paul II) is becoming ever more urgent. But Christians are confused about the role of technological development in this process. While there are plenty of critics of capitalism, this is less true of technology—the advance of technology being more obviously

responsible for the “successes” of capitalism than an economic system based on selfishness and greed. In the 1960s, the Second Vatican Council adopted, in *Gaudium et Spes*, a generally optimistic view that “mankind’s triumphs are signs of God’s greatness and the fruit of his sublime plan” (n. 34), and that worldly progress may lead to “the better ordering of human society” (n. 39). The hope has often been expressed in Church documents since that time that moral and scientific progress will proceed hand in hand. Yet the Council was also aware of the ambiguity of worldly progress (see *Gaudium et Spes* sections 54–57); and it is clear that in fact there is much cause for concern. What once looked like hope now appears to have been wishful thinking.[7]

The next phase in the development of Catholic social teaching—from Pope Francis onwards—will have to include some attempt to analyze the social and ethical issues raised by recent technological developments and their applications. That in turn will necessarily involve renewed attention not only to anthropology and ethics, but also to eschatology, and the theology of history.

### Human Ecology

One of the key developments in the social teaching of John Paul II was to recognize the importance of human technological development on the environment, prompted by the huge secular “Green” movement that had been gathering popular momentum since the time of the Council. Whatever its faults, Rachel Carson’s book *Silent Spring* (1962) had drawn the world’s awareness to the often irreparable damage being done to the natural world by pesticides and other forms of pollution. The emerging science of ecology demonstrated the interconnectedness of all life on earth. Photographs of the earth from space sent back by the Apollo astronauts served as icons to raise awareness of the fragility of what came to be known as the earthly “ecosystem.” Just as the Church had belatedly acknowledged the new problems raised by industrial society in the nineteenth century, so in the second half of the twentieth the environmental crisis became an important element in papal teaching.

It was mentioned (along with the threat of nuclear war) in sections 8 and 15 of John Paul II’s first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis* (1978), but its fullest statement came in the 1990 Message for the World Day of Peace, *Peace with God the Creator; Peace with All Creation*. On the basis of the “integrity of creation” the pope argues that “Simplicity, moderation, and discipline, as well as a spirit of sacrifice, must become part of everyday life” (n. 13). This amounts to “a genuine conversion in ways of thought and behavior.”

The same teaching was then picked up in the Pope’s social encyclicals—the main vehicle for his teaching on faith and morals—such as *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987), *Centesimus Annus* (1991), and *Evangelium Vitae* (1995)—and from there entered into the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the *Compendium of Social Doctrine*. In SRS he insisted that “one cannot use with impunity the different categories of beings, whether living or inanimate—animals, plants, the natural elements—simply as one wishes, according to one’s own economic needs” (n. 34), while in CA (n. 38) and EV (n. 42) he introduced the term “human ecology” to refer to the intimate relationship between the welfare of humanity (which he linked to the well being of the family) and that of the environment, based on the interdependence of all life on earth.[8]

In a General Audience of 2001, near the end of his life, John Paul II expressed his disappointment with the response to these calls of responsible stewardship (our “ecological vocation,” as he called it in a talk given at Castel Gondolfo on 25 August 2002), and the need for an “ecological conversion.”

This close relationship between environmental ecology and the moral or “human ecology” of the family also became one of the hallmarks of Pope Benedict XVI’s teaching. He even set a good example by

installing solar panels in the Vatican and planting trees in Hungary, attempting to make the Vatican the first carbon-neutral state in the world. Like his predecessor he was at loggerheads with environmentalists who see human populations as a plague upon the planet.

Morality requires us to judge means as well as ends. There are many possible ways to reduce a population, ranging from genocide to migration, and to reduce the number of births per household, from natural family planning to abortion. The Church teaches “responsible parenthood,” encouraging parents to judge carefully how many children they might reasonably seek to have in their particular circumstances, only using morally licit methods, such as abstaining from sexual relations at times when conception is likely, *not* methods that involve abortion, or forms of contraception that harm the healthy functioning of the body.

Man is called to be the wise steward of creation. The Church must defend earth, water and air as “gifts of creation that belong to everyone”, and help to prevent mankind from destroying itself (n. 51).[9] These sentiments have established themselves as part of the common sense of our age, especially among the young. At the same time, we must respect and defend the diversity of human culture, not indiscriminately but prudently, and not assume that every human community on the face of the planet must necessarily be aspiring to exactly the same “Western” lifestyle, with its addiction to electronics and pharmaceuticals.

This means, among other things, that authentic human development is best served not merely by technology—we will look at that temptation below—but by *appropriate* technology (CV, n. 27). The term is associated with the Catholic social thinker and Green movement pioneer E.F. Schumacher. It refers to technology that does not require infidelity to the “human”—technology that can serve human development without destroying what is of value in a culture. The impetus for the idea seems originally to have come from Gandhi’s advocacy of sewing machines, spinning wheels, and bicycles—in other words, relatively simple technologies that nevertheless can make a huge difference to productivity at the local level, empowering the poor, and requiring fewer resources to produce and maintain.

The idea of appropriate technology could perhaps be given a wider application, but it tends to be referred to in connection with the needs of the developing world, where capital is scarce and self-sufficiency is the immediate goal. One example will suffice. In Africa, there has been a lot of talk about sand dams. The decentralized storage of water is an important strategy in semi-arid and arid regions outside the reach of perennial rivers, springs, deep groundwater, or other conventional water sources. Building small concrete dams backfilled with sand in seasonal rivers is an ancient method of storing water that is now being used extensively in Kenya and elsewhere to support local farming communities. As water becomes an increasingly scarce resource in many parts of the world, this relatively cheap solution is becoming more important. Similarly, the development of simple grazing plans for livestock in the world’s vast endangered grasslands can help to prevent desertification. This is a field in which Catholic charities and missionary orders should be heavily involved.

## A New World Order

If the Church were to throw herself behind sustainability and appropriate technology in the developing world it would be an excellent thing. But whether even such a shift would change the direction of human history is questionable. As technology, as we say, “advances” (towards what?), it creates a new situation—a new balance between the world we receive as gift, and the world we build to our own specifications. For the first time in human history, more people are living in urban than rural surroundings. And it is city-dwellers who create the greatest negative impact on the environment.

Human history is, of course, made up of transitions. It is dynamic, although until recently the changes tended to take place over great periods of time. Civilizations such as those of Egypt or China existed for millennia without changing beyond recognition. But in the last few centuries the pace has quickened. According to numerous surveys of cultural history,[10] the crucial “passage to modernity” took place in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century through to the seventeenth, bringing an end to a civilization that was still in approximate continuity with every ancient and traditional civilization known to us. The transition was driven by thinkers such as Ockham, Bacon, and Descartes. The Reformation and Enlightenment are associated with many triumphs of the human spirit, many further achievements and discoveries (the Industrial Revolution, the Age of Discovery, the Atomic Age, etc.), but each of these contributed to the further acceleration of technological and social change on a planetary scale.

By the nineteenth century, a new myth began to dominate the European imagination, helping to cut us off from our own past: the Myth of Progress. All previous ages were seen as primitive and undeveloped; our own as superior and destined to inherit the earth. The myth was fuelled by the obvious advance of technology and the global dominance of the colonial powers. Technological progress was real enough, and on this depended the exploitation of natural resources and the creation of economic wealth for which capitalism inevitably took all the credit. Moral and social progress towards a more just and kindly order was perhaps less real, for while the new information media made it possible for human consciences to be stung by events far away from home, it also enabled the easy manipulation of human feeling at the expense of independent thought.

Modernity gave rise to three other great forces or “big ideas” in particular: *democracy* (the sovereignty of the people), *nationalism* (the sovereignty of states) and *rationalism* (the sovereignty of reason). In a way each of these was a manifestation of the rising tide of *individualism*, involving dissolution into ever-smaller units of the traditions that had previously bound people together, culminating in a conception of society determined by the will of the individual. But this was only the beginning. It was the phase that followed that laid the foundations of the urbanization of culture.

Nationalism requires the support of industrial might, and “industry” in the modern sense is the rationalized organization of labour to serve production, trade, and war. Postmodernity was simply a continuation and intensification of this logic. By 1970 it had permeated most Western societies to the core. This transition was from the previous concern with democracy, nationalism, and rationalism towards *consumerism* (political choices reduced to consumer choices), *globalization* (transnationals, the “international community”, the worldwide web), and *relativism* (truth replaced by doctrines of convenience).

To illustrate: for a time it had made sense for the United States to see itself as a “melting pot” in which refugees from many cultural and ethnic traditions could willingly be absorbed. Their new loyalty would be to the nation that gave them a home. In the historical phase that followed, however, this was less and less the case. Subcultures would no longer submit to a national ethos; they could not be assimilated in the old way.

Increasingly, it is being suggested that the era of nationalism itself may now be coming to an end—at least in some parts of the world. The most serious problems facing mankind are either too big or too small for nations to hope to tackle. In *A Turning Point for Europe?* Cardinal Ratzinger spoke of nationalism as a modern heresy, a form of tribalism that spread across Europe in the nineteenth century, no doubt of temporary duration.[11] Perhaps the more effective unit of human organization is no longer the nation, but (as it has been in the past but now on a larger scale) the city.[12]

Nations, which are created to a large extent by a process of historical accident and political fortune, are not the most natural way of governing large groups of people or creating deep-rooted solidarity. This is obvious in the case of the nations of the Middle East and Africa established by the influence of European powers. Cultural, economic, and geographical *regions* would seem a more appropriate basis for such solidarity, and cities are best placed to take the leadership of these regions. Global governance through UN representatives meeting in New York is demonstrably ineffective, whereas collaboration between cities with similar or connected problems generates an international network that may actually work.

Urbanization has other implications. In the new phase of human civilization, technology no longer serves the nation; it aims to serve the individual. We have moved from the crudities of mass production to a more sophisticated technological process that allows the appearance of consumer choice and products customized for individual needs and taste. The retail economy is driven by the search for the non-standard item that will serve (for a few days!) as a status symbol. All of this is at best a pathetic imitation, and at worst a demonic mockery, of the true individuality achieved through the traditional crafts in the period before modern industry made them economically unviable. (More of that later.)

Instead of simply draining people and resources from the countryside, the city now spills over and absorbs the country. The ultimate aim of industrial civilization is nearing fulfillment: the actual replacement of the natural world by a manufactured world entirely designed by man. The postmodern manufactured world is, however, not merely a world of physical artifacts dominating the countryside and the skyline (factories, pylons, skyscrapers); in this latter stage of our culture the manufactured world increasingly exists in cyberspace. It is a world of information (and of supposed information, in the sense of propaganda)—that is, of virtual reality.

The city (and the “virtual” city located in cyberspace) is not the only candidate to replace the nation as the dominant power in our civilization. Another is the corporation, that mysterious entity through which most human business is now conducted. Invested with an identity in law amounting to that of a “person,” the existence of the corporation is based on a spirit that unites its members, and mutual submission in that spirit for the sake of a common good. The corporation was originally a religious idea, in fact it derives from the Jewish notion of the covenant, and was transferred *via* St Paul to the Christian Church, before in the middle ages being used as the model for the corporations that ran universities and guilds.[13]

Whatever the powers in charge, whether city, corporation, secret cabal, or some new kind of community formed over the internet, postmodern culture is decentered, in the sense that it is even less bound to tradition than its predecessor was. The past, with all its riches, is either filtered through the technology that presents it to view, or eliminated and forgotten altogether. On the other hand, this “decentering” goes hand in hand with a centering elsewhere: for example, in the liberal ideology of consumption. This explains how our society can be both so *individualistic* and so *conformist*. This simultaneous decentering or detaching from tradition and recentering in an alternative liberal tradition (that vaunts its freedom precisely from tradition) is already characteristic of modernity.

The political categories of Left and Right originated in the French National Assembly as the nation state began to define itself in contradistinction to the *ancien régime*, but have become increasingly difficult to apply. At our more advanced stage of modernity, politics are determined by a range of other concerns, particularly a growing anxiety about security. It is likely, for example, that before long a great many instruments of mass destruction will be in the hands of individuals and rogue states. The instability that this creates is becoming the major political concern on the planet in the present century, cutting

across all party political lines. The battle over the freedom of the internet is typical of the new world order. The demand for control (in the interests of security, peace, unity, or ecology) will gradually override concerns for freedom, privacy, and local autonomy. The growing power and sophistication of our technology requires ever-more sophisticated safety measures.

In this way the new technological mass culture inevitably penetrates every nook and cranny, erodes every pocket of resistance.

### The Christian Response

At the time of *Rerum Novarum*, at the height of the Victorian period, the Church could presuppose the existence of a certain cultural framework. She assumed a community still to some extent rooted through an agricultural economy in the natural environment, and a common belief in the dignity of human nature, the same in all human beings. Thanks to the vestiges of pre-modern civilization, in other words, she was able to appeal to a natural moral law and attack specific injustices. But once the logic of modernity has finally eroded even the vestiges of pre-modernity, the Church must go further. She has no alternative but to give a whole new religious inspiration to the culture. That is why Pope John Paul II made the “new evangelization” the theme of his pontificate, and why his social encyclicals have to be read merely as a part of a wider cultural critique—the critique of the “culture of death” advanced by *Veritatis Splendor* (1993), *Evangelium Vitae* (1995) and *Fides et Ratio* (1998)—and why Benedict XVI re-launched the new evangelization.

Whereas the target of *Rerum Novarum* had to be the injustices brought about by industrial capitalism (and the socialist reaction to capitalism), the target of the new cultural critique must be—in addition to these specific injustices—something much more subtle and pervasive: our consumerist, technologically driven way of life, the logic that expresses itself in this way of life, and the spiritual disorder that lies behind it. The tyranny of mechanism is the projection of a mentality that reduces all of nature, including human nature, to something merely mechanical.

In fact this is one place where Catholic social teaching meets the “new feminism” called for by Pope John Paul II in 1995,[14] since this “tyranny of mechanism” is due to a certain distortion of what might be called the “masculine genius” (a point we will pick up again at the end of chapter 9). Hans Urs von Balthasar makes the connection as follows: “Under the guise of equality and equalization of the sexes, the goal is being pursued to masculinize the entire civilization, which even now is marked by male technological rationality. By further putting the sexual sphere at the disposal of every technological manipulation, the person-centered height and depth of sexual differentiation is lost.”[15]

The lifestyle of the affluent West does still, to be sure, generate specific inequalities of wealth and patterns of exploitation across the planet, much as the early stages of capitalism generated great hardship and injustice in the West. These injustices continue to cry out to heaven: they need to be denounced and opposed, just as before. The lifestyle of postmodernity, however, has lifted a mask and revealed the “death of God” and the reduction of knowledge to power that lies at the very core of the modern project—much deeper than these important, but relatively superficial, injustices. When in the medieval civilization (for all its faults) work, art, study, and political life were perceived as belonging to a religiously based or sanctioned order, these things were nevertheless still (in principle) oriented towards the divine, even if society was divided as to how this orientation was to be expressed.

But the practically atheistic or secularized society of modernity, which is shaped from within no longer by a religious tradition but by other forces altogether (and this applies whether or not a large number of citizens attend churches on a regular basis), can have no official religion, no thanksgiving to God on

behalf of the society as a whole. Such official religious ceremonies that remain are emptied of real content; they become purely conventional, if not meaningless, and are likely to be abolished in the name of efficiency. Thus modernity entails, ultimately, an injustice that transcends the occasional or accidental exploitation of man by man—a more fundamental injustice against not only the image of God in man, but God himself.[16]

Lest this seem to be simply a plea for a return to an older sacral society, I should add that the roots of the modern (dis)order lie far back in time, and that medieval society was marked not only by “faults”, as I have just hinted, but by deep flaws and problems of its own. This should not distract us from the seriousness of our situation. An attack on God is an attack on the cosmos, and vice versa. One of the most important victims of the historical process is a sense of the integrity of the world as a gift of God formed by divine wisdom. Respect for the “integrity of creation” is inseparably linked to a sense of the transcendent, and of the Absolute. A concern with poverty and injustice is also reinforced by this awareness of the sacred, and thus of our responsibility towards the divine image in the world.

### Not Neutral

Against this background, the critique of technology developed by Benedict XVI in *Caritas in Veritate* makes a lot of sense. Controversies over abortion in the late twentieth century presaged even more bitter and profound disputes over genetic engineering in the twenty-first. When the British government licensed the cloning of human embryos for the purpose of medical experimentation, and at the same time the sale of abortifacients to children without parental permission, parts of the Catholic community recognized that a new threshold had been crossed. It seemed to some that humankind was now in the business of inventing *new sins* for the first time in history. Only by examining the (implicit) anthropology of our society, its operative assumptions and theories concerning human nature and its destiny, could Catholic thought make a contribution to resolving the ethical issues raised by modern technology. A merely moralistic response to technological developments—a list of rights and wrongs—was insufficient.

The problem lies deeper, in an anthropology assumed in the technology and in modernity itself. Technology is far from morally neutral, as it is frequently assumed to be in both popular and scholarly writings on this subject. “The medium is the message” (McLuhan), and a technology is not simply a technique that may be employed for good or ill purposes. It carries within its very structure a value system and a worldview—perhaps even a metaphysics and a theology.[17]

In *Caritas in Veritate* Pope Benedict addresses the question of technology, which has been of concern to philosophers since Heidegger.[18] On the one hand, he writes, “Technology enables us to exercise dominion over matter, to reduce risks, to save labor, to improve our conditions of life” (n. 69). On the other hand, it can become “an ideological power that threatens to confine us within an *a priori* that holds us back from encountering being and truth. Were that to happen, we would all know, evaluate and make decisions about our life situations from within a technocratic cultural perspective to which we would belong structurally, without ever being able to discover a meaning that is not of our own making” (n. 70).

The idea of technology as *ideological power* is extremely important, and needs a bit of unpacking. It may be helpful to look what some of the more extreme critics of technology have said on this point. Despite the fact that Pope Benedict does not refer to them by name, he may well have had them in mind, and if not they at least clarify the meaning of such a statement. The “bluff” in the title of Jacques Ellul’s book *The Technological Bluff*, for example, refers to the widespread and growing conviction that technology is the answer to every problem (unemployment, pollution, poverty, war, depression,

inequality...).[19] I have already referred to Georges Bernanos and his concept of the “imbecile.” In fact many of the most perceptive critics of this syndrome seem to come from France. Michel Henry sums up this line of thought in the most vivid terms:

Technology is alchemy; it is the self-fulfillment of nature in place of the self-fulfillment of the life that we are. It is barbarism, the new barbarism of our time, in place of culture. Inasmuch as it puts the prescriptions and regulations of life out of play, it is not simply barbarism in its most extreme and inhumane form that has ever been known—it is sheer madness.[20]

The slide into insanity began, he claims, when Galileo eliminated subjective perceptions or “secondary qualities” from the domain of reality, simply on the grounds that they were not measurable.

Benedict’s language is necessarily more moderate, though its implications may be every bit as radical once they have been thought through. His critique rests on a profound Christian anthropology, a sense that we receive our own existence from God, that truth is a “given,” and that our true freedom lies in respect for the “call of being” (n. 70). Like Ellul, he argues that we have come to rely on “automatic or impersonal forces” to improve our lot, but this is a mistake. “When technology is allowed to take over, the result is confusion between ends and means, such that the sole criterion for action in business is thought to be the maximization of profit, in politics the consolidation of power, and in science the findings of research” (n. 71).

There must be “moral consistency” between ends and means. That is to say, technology must be at the service not of our desires and intentions, but of truth, and in particular the truth of the human person who is made for love. Benedict presumably agrees that technology is hardly ever morally “neutral” in the way we assume when we say, casually, that everything depends on the way you choose to use it (the same computer can be used to write a masterpiece, design a bomb, or view pornography). Adrian Walker puts his finger on the problem here when he points out that this faith in the neutrality of technology merely expresses,

the essence of technology itself – the conviction that the [human] transformation of nature is uncircumscribed by any moral standard given in the nature of things apart from human will. The belief that technology is a set of neutral instruments, like technology itself, is of a piece with the typically modern conviction that there is no moral order in physical nature, just brute matter whose only meaning we put into it through our transformative making and doing.[21]

A given piece of technology should be judged not just according to the end it is being used for, but the ends implicit in the technology itself as “means.” A computer, says Walker, processes information, which seems harmless enough, but this means that it carries within it the idea that meaning can be broken down into packets of electrical signals; thus necessarily treating a whole as if it were what Aristotle called a “heap” (*soros*).

Telephone, television, and the internet, for example, change our sense of space and time, and have a variety of effects on the relationships within the family and the wider social community. Some of these effects will be humanly beneficial, others less so, but an assessment of the technology is not possible without paying attention to the overall pattern of these effects, and to the purpose or function of the technology in relation to the purpose of human life itself. In what respect is a given tool actually serving the true end of man?[22]

In other words, technology always has purposes of its own, or (if you prefer) an implicit logic that we accept when we buy into the machine for our own purposes. Technology represents an entire world-

view, an organizing myth for our culture, and increasingly it is coming to shape the way we view and experience our own bodies and those of our children.

Up until now, the Church has tended to go along with the general view that technological progress is benign and in any case irresistible. Christians must simply make the best of it. Every new invention may be used for good or ill: the Church should simply discourage its use for ill. If technologies in themselves are *not* morally or culturally neutral after all, then this policy needs to be re-examined. The crisis over human cloning is likely to force such a re-examination in any case, for now even many scientists and technicians are asking: “are some kinds of knowledge so terrible they should not be pursued?”

### Transhumanism

This question was phrased in the *Newsweek* “Issues 2001” special edition, which drew attention particularly to a widely-quoted paper by Bill Joy, the cofounder and chief scientist of Sun Microsystems, in the April 2000 issue of *Wired* magazine. This paper was influential and alarming because it came from a man at the cutting edge of the present technological revolution. He wrote: “we are on the cusp of the further perfection of extreme evil”, through the “empowerment of extreme individuals”, and the “pursuit of unrestricted and undirected growth through science and technology”, especially through robotics, genetic engineering, and nanotechnology.

In his article, Bill Joy went on to evoke a truly apocalyptic scenario: the prospect that (if we do not first destroy ourselves) our technology itself, soon to be self-replicating, may dispense with human beings altogether:

By 2030, we are likely to be able to build machines, in quantity, a million times as powerful as the personal computers of today.... As this enormous computing power is combined with the manipulative advances of the physical sciences and the new, deep understandings in genetics, enormous transformative power is being unleashed. These combinations open up the opportunity to completely redesign the world, for better or worse: the replicating and evolving processes that have been confined to the natural world are about to become realms of human endeavor.

There is in fact a powerful “transhumanist” movement of people who believe man is about to take control of his own evolution, or that he is about to cede his place to a *homo superior* or “posthuman” of his own construction. We see already the widespread use of performance-enhancing drugs and prosthetics. It is a small step from present forms of medical intervention to the incorporation of genetic modifications or improvements that can be passed on through human reproduction, or replicated commercially in artificial wombs. Among the modifications suggested are gills to enable human beings to adapt to an undersea environment, or more radical changes to enable life on other planets or in permanent space stations.

Naturally the rapid development of information technology and computing suggests other scenarios, such as the incorporation of a direct and permanent connection to the internet within the human brain itself, and the creation of artificial intelligence that will appear to be conscious and creative. Robots, androids, and cyborgs were once the stuff of science fiction, but the children who grew up on these tales are now being employed to make them a reality. It is widely assumed, as Joy notes, that once an artificial—or artificially enhanced—intelligence has been created that is capable of self-replication, the speed of evolution will increase even more rapidly, leading to futures we can barely imagine.

Joy believes that the new technologies are being developed less by governments than by corporate

enterprise. However, the possibility that such technologies might be employed by the State for coercive social engineering or military purposes also seems extremely likely.

Common sense, and the experience we have already accumulated of human interference with the environment, suggest that such developments will not only give rise to new forms (and new extremes) of wealth and poverty, but pose a risk to the biosphere itself that cannot be easily quantified. Joy would prefer to err on the side of caution. “The only realistic alternative I see is relinquishment: to limit development of the technologies that are too dangerous, by limiting our pursuit of certain kinds of knowledge.” He looks to his grandmother and to the Dali Lama for examples of “common sense”, and takes hope from the unilateral US abandonment of the development of biological weapons, which “stemmed from the realization that while it would take an enormous effort to create these terrible weapons, they could from then on easily be duplicated and fall into the hands of rogue nations or groups”. However, verifying relinquishment will require transparency amounting to the loss of privacy, the invention of new forms of protection for intellectual property, and the adoption by scientists and engineers of “a strong code of ethical conduct” akin to the Hippocratic Oath.

It is hard to imagine attempts to ban certain technologies, or at least to prevent them falling into private hands (out of fear of “unacceptable risk” and public outcry), being more than partially and temporarily effective. After all, some at least of the new technologies being developed will have very clear and direct benefits, and it is easy to cry “Luddite!” However, it is not the case that research is currently being driven by sheer curiosity (or the desire to benefit mankind) along an inevitable path. Scientific endeavor always runs along certain channels, created by political and commercial pressures, by social and metaphysical assumptions, by the availability of funding and desire for fame, and by the manifold “spirit of the age.” Rather than ask how we might repress certain types of research, we might therefore consider how to redirect some of those creative energies—to make them, perhaps, even more unambiguously beneficial to mankind. Bill Joy himself touches on this when he suggests we might “rethink our utopian choices”—the dreams that define our direction.

What goals are we setting for ourselves? Men might have been standing on Mars by now, if the drive to conquer space had not evaporated after the United States beat Soviet Russia to the Moon. Funding went in other directions. Similarly, the direction of current research can be changed by legislation and investment that sets other priorities, priorities more in tune with our true purpose on this earth and with the dignity of the human person.

It is a vital aspect of this dignity to which we now turn. It is essential that we reclaim our humanity in the face of the Machine, and to do this we must understand the human body as more than a machine.

---

[1] Bernanos, *Tradition of Freedom*, 156.

[2] *RSA Journal* (July 1997).

[3] *Religion and the Modern State*, 80.

[4] See especially Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, Vol. I, pp. 136–41.

[5] Josef Pieper: *An Anthology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 86–7.

[6] Theo-Drama, IV, p. 427, citing John 15:24.

[7] For a detailed analysis of *Gaudium et Spes*, please see papers in *Communio: International Catholic Review* 23:4 (Spring 1996) by Walter Kasper, Pedro Morandé, and David L. Schindler.

[8] More should be said about the treatment of animals, who tend to be neglected in treatments of Catholic social teaching (including this one, I regret to say). In farming and the cosmetics industry, not to mention commonly in scientific experimentation, they are cruelly mistreated as machines without feeling or dignity. Such mistreatment thrives in obscurity and ignorance, and indeed most people never see the conditions in which such animals are kept and the ways they are exploited. Although she affirms that animals may be “used” by man and should not be treated as “persons,” the Church also condemns cruelty to animals in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (n. 2416), as follows: “Animals are God’s creatures. He surrounds them with his providential care. By their mere existence they bless him and give him glory. Thus men owe them kindness. We should recall the gentleness with which saints like St Francis of Assisi or St Philip Neri treated animals.”

[9] On 19 March 2013, at the inaugural Mass of his pontificate, Pope Francis spoke of the need to protect our environment: “I would like to ask all those who have positions of responsibility in economic, political and social life, and all men and women of goodwill: let us be ‘protectors’ of creation, protectors of God’s plan inscribed in nature, protectors of one another and of the environment.”

[10] Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (Yale University Press, 1993). See also Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Vol. IV: The Action* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), pp. 457-64; Glenn W. Olsen, *The Turn to Transcendence: The Role of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 2010).

[11] J. Ratzinger, *A Turning Point for Europe? The Church in the Modern World – Assessment and Forecast* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), pp. 120-123. He goes on to argue that this heresy will become a thing of the past only if we renounce our belief in progress, recognize the priority of ethics over politics, and reclaim the idea of God (pp. 135-142). A more positive view of nations is this. The identity of a nation is an aspect of the common good of its people—what they know, will, feel, and love writ large; what they won’t do, and what they will. It is the past (memory) and the future (imagination). It is the stories it tells about itself, the ideals it aspires to. Deeper than all this it is a mission. As in the case of my personal identity, I am what I am given to do. I am unfinished; I must become what I am. Thus we find our identity when we hear a call, the summons to be a self. This is why a nation has a patron saint. Often, that saint expresses the particular character and mission of the nation, at least in some symbolic way. England should be asking St George, what dragon must we conquer?

[12] Benjamin Barber, *If Mayors Ruled the World: Why They Should, and Why They Already Do* (Yale University Press, 2013). An example proposed by Barber is that 80% of all energy is used in cities, and 80% of global carbon emissions come from cities of more than 50,000 people. Where nations regularly fail to sign energy and carbon agreements, cities can take the lead and work together much more effectively. The campaign against international terrorism may also benefit from collaboration between cities. Paradoxically, the intensity of national feeling may grow as its rational basis disappears. Nationalism remains a strong force, and may be expected to become more violent the more it comes under threat. Another unit of social organization that is a strong candidate for replacing the nation in power and influence is the corporation. On this topic, see Michael Black, “The Crisis of the Corporation” online at [www.secondspring.co.uk/economy/articles.html](http://www.secondspring.co.uk/economy/articles.html)

[13] See Michael Black, “The Crisis of the Corporation,” in *Second Spring* (Issue 17, Spring 2013). It is

worth noting that the only corporations that survive and flourish over a long period of time are those which treat their enterprises as "living work communities"—i.e. humanistically rather than as purely economic machines, valuing human talent above money and capital. See Arie de Geus, *The Living Company: Growth, Learning, and Longevity in Business* (London: Nicholas Brealey, 1999).

[14] "In transforming culture so that it supports life, women occupy a place, in thought and action, which is unique and decisive. It depends on them to promote a 'new feminism' which rejects the temptation of imitating models of 'male domination,' in order to acknowledge and affirm the true genius of women in every aspect of the life of society, and overcome all discrimination, violence, and exploitation"—John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae* (1995), n. 99. The new feminism will be treated in more depth by Léonie Caldecott in a forthcoming book.

[15] H.U. von Balthasar, "How Weighty is the Argument from 'Uninterrupted Tradition' to Justify the Male Priesthood?" in Helmut Moll (ed.), *The Church and Women* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), p. 159. Balthasar makes the point that discussion of these points should be purified of all classical, patristic, and medieval antifeminism, which of course is not always easy in practice.

[16] Furthermore, the injustice against God that is bound up with the abandonment of religion in turn leads to the further abuse of man, who is now systematically stripped of his transcendent dignity.

[17] See David L. Schindler, "George Grant and Modernity's Technological Ontology," in *Ordering Love: Liberal Societies and the Memory of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), pp. 277-87.

[18] Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977).

[19] J. Ellul, *The Technological Bluff* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990).

[20] M. Henry, *Barbarism* (London: Continuum, 2012), p. 52.

[21] A. Walker, "Not Neutral: Technology and the 'Theology of the Body,'" *Second Spring* 7, p. 29.

[22] For my view of the potentially catastrophic effects of over-reliance on technology in education see S. Caldecott, *Beauty in the Word*.

# Towards an Integral Ecology

LÉONIE CALDECOTT

The “globalization of the technocratic paradigm” (*Laudato si'*, no. 106) is one of the characteristic signs of our times, a testament to the enduring power of the ideal of technological mastery over nature. And yet for all its fascination, this ideal is far from uncontested. Consider the growing prestige of what we might call the “ecological paradigm,” which for some time now has been marching in noisy protest alongside the technocratic victory parade. Despite our attachment to the dream of technological dominion - or perhaps because of it - we seem unable to shake the feeling that the dream is at least part nightmare. The reign of technocracy, we sense, is not quite as liberating as its ideological champions would have us believe.

Ironically, mainstream environmentalism is less an alternative to technology than a shadow inevitably cast by the technocratic paradigm itself. As British filmmaker Adam Curtis pointed out in his documentary *All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace*, the early environmentalist movement approached nature through the lens of computer technology, interpreting eco-systems as self-adjusting mechanisms whose smooth functioning was disturbed only by the ill-conceived meddling of human beings. In thus conceiving nature as a self-regulating biological machine system, the pioneers of environmental thought remained unconsciously beholden to Cartesian anthropocentrism. Their successors may have attempted to overcome this tacit Cartesianism, but the environmental movement still tends to isolate man from the rest of nature, even if only to dismiss him as an alien intruder or, alternatively, to strip him of the uniqueness that so-called “specieism” unjustly ascribes to *homo sapiens*.

In her comprehensive reading of Pope Francis’ *Laudato si'*, Mary Taylor shows how the Pontiff transcends the dialectic between technocracy and environmentalism in the direction of an “integral ecology” that respects both the solidarity and the difference between the human being and the rest of the cosmos. Man is at once a part of nature and its steward, and natural ecology and “human ecology” therefore stand or fall together, as Francis’ predecessor, Benedict XVI, notes in an address reprinted here: “Since faith in the Creator is an essential part of the Christian creed,” Benedict writes, “the Church cannot and must not limit herself to passing on to the faithful the message of salvation alone. She has a responsibility towards creation, and must publicly assert this responsibility. In so doing, she must not only defend earth, water and air as gifts of creation belonging to all. She must also protect man from self-destruction. What is needed is something like a human ecology, correctly understood.”

In his *Rise of the Machines*, Stratford Caldecott offers a historically informed, philosophically rich account of the ecological question that anticipates the vision of “integral ecology” unfolded in *Laudato si'*. The ecological crisis, Caldecott shows, is rooted in a diabolical attempt to divide (and confuse) God and man, nature and grace, the human being and the environment. In response, Caldecott seeks to enlarge the scope of the ecological question, which, he suggests, concerns nothing less than the integrity of creation (human and non-human) as an image of the Trinity. Caldecott’s argument thus nicely complements E.F. Schumacher’s vision of the unity of ecology and economy (Schumacher’s influential book *Small is Beautiful* is reviewed in this issue, alongside William Cavanaugh’s ground-breaking *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire*). Both ecological and economic perspectives are seen by

these thinkers primarily as matters of metaphysical and religious import, and only secondarily as problems of technique and management. This does not mean that their work has no practical application: indeed Cavanaugh has expressed the wish that his writing will contribute “to a kind of theological microeconomics”. If we take the principle of subsidiarity seriously, it becomes apparent that the good of the “common household” (*Laudato si'*, 1) is the matrix and measure of technical rationality, which is rational only to the degree that it submits to the gentle discipline of the *bonum commune*.

Like Popes Benedict and Francis, Caldecott also stresses the “close relationship between environmental ecology and the moral or ‘human ecology’ of the family.” This relationship forms one of the central motifs of Sophie Caldecott’s meditation on family, ecology and fair trade: “As my father wrote, ‘we need a humanistic ecological vision that takes account of the special nature of human beings, as well as the ecosystem in which we belong.’ This vision, as Pope Benedict said, should take in ‘not only the environment but also life, sexuality, marriage, the family, social relations’; that is, our ‘duties towards the human person’ (*Caritas in Veritate*).” As Catherine Pakaluk and Angela Winkel confirm, in their review of current research into the factors triggering the environmental crisis, all these dimensions are interconnected, even if each problem is distinct. The living awareness of this differentiated unity must lie at the heart of any “integral ecology” worthy of the name.

Despite its continuing prestige, the technological ideal has failed to live up to its bright promise. Instead of giving us authentic rule over creation, it has yoked us to a caricature of rule—a program of loveless tyranny—instead. The solution, of course, does not lie in a renunciation of the human vocation to rule and to make, much less in some falsely humble self-erasure of mankind from the natural world. Rather, it lies in a recovery of the true ideal of dominion, whose characteristic note is not imperializing self-aggrandizement, but humble service for the good of our “common household.” It is the servant who reigns, just as it is *homo adorans* who is the truth of the *homo faber*.

Indeed, is there a way in which these two aspects of human nature, the spiritual and the practical, can be brought into greater harmony? This is a question which integral ecologists must address, for fear of remaining in the realm of ideals which are all too vulnerable to the impact of current realities. Michael Galdo’s *Witness* describes the actual experience of living on the land and farming, according to both catholic and ecological principles. He describes what it is to hold a respect for the natural environment in tandem with a eucharistic sensibility: the work of human hands blessed by the sense of thanksgiving for divine gifts. His wife Carla Galdo, in her review of Father Thomas Dubay’s book *Happy Are You Poor: The Simple Life and Spiritual Freedom* also injects an element of realism into the conundrums we face when we try to apply these principles in daily life. Like Sophie Caldecott, she asks a very important question: what, for those who need to engage deeply with the material dimension, can help us differentiate between an unhealthy consumerism, and an authentic engagement with the beautifully made products of human hands, designed to last, which a sane economy ought to be supporting?

Whatever the debates still to come, “Integral Ecology” cannot simply be another one-sided program; nor can it be a panacea inspired by an ultimately technocratic Prometheanism. It must be the fruit of Catholic humility and realism. If it succeeds in this, it will be a pedagogy for (re)learning the viceregal dominion reserved for us, the children of God: whose glorious freedom, Saint Paul reminds us, has been the goal of creation’s longing from the beginning.

---

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

MARY TAYLOR

## 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.”<sup>[i]</sup>

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.<sup>[ii]</sup> 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;<sup>[iii]</sup> 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,”<sup>[iv]</sup> 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.”<sup>[v]</sup> This seminal paper was the harshest environmentalist attack on Christianity to that point,<sup>[vi]</sup> 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.<sup>[vii]</sup> It was specifically White’s use of “anthropocentric” as a pejorative—called “the main conceptual breakthrough of White’s essay”<sup>[viii]</sup>—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.”<sup>[ix]</sup> 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<sup>[x]</sup>—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,”<sup>[xi]</sup> 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.<sup>[xii]</sup>

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<sup>[xiii]</sup>) 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.”<sup>[xiv]</sup>

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 21<sup>st</sup> century. In ecological thinking it remembers the patristic/Medieval notion of man as microcosm and mediator, an *imago mundi* who “contains all things,”<sup>[xv]</sup> 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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.”<sup>[xvi]</sup> 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.<sup>[xvii]</sup>

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.<sup>[xviii]</sup> 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,”<sup>[xix]</sup> 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.<sup>[xx]</sup> “A glance suffices” to make us aware that we are “subject to [the] call to responsible action.”<sup>[xxi]</sup> 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.”<sup>[xxii]</sup>

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.”<sup>[xxiii]</sup> 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.”<sup>[xxiv]</sup>

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,<sup>[xxv]</sup> 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,”<sup>[xxvi]</sup> it seems there is already a great deal of interpretation going on. If a “glance suffices... to see distress and disorder,”<sup>[xxvii]</sup> 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”?<sup>[xxviii]</sup> 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.<sup>[xxix]</sup> 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.”<sup>[xxx]</sup> 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.”[xxxix] 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.”[xxxix] Like Casey, he speaks specifically of “face to face encounters”[xxxix] as engendering responsibility because of “the demand reality places on us,”[xxxix] 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.[xxxix] 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.[xli]

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.”<sup>[xlii]</sup> 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.”<sup>[xliii]</sup>

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;<sup>[xliv]</sup> 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”<sup>[xlv]</sup>). 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.”<sup>[xlvi]</sup> 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.’”<sup>[xlvii]</sup> 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,”<sup>[xlviii]</sup> and morality is only “one of [the] forms of appearance”<sup>[xlix]</sup> of this greatest of gifts.

A wide-ranging study of Spaemann's contributions to human and natural ecology begs to be written.<sup>[i]</sup> 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."<sup>[ii]</sup>

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: every last 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.<sup>[iii]</sup>

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,"<sup>[iii]</sup> 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<sup>[iv]</sup> (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."<sup>[v]</sup> 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.”<sup>[lvi]</sup> 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.”<sup>[lvii]</sup> 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.”<sup>[lviii]</sup> 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.”<sup>[lix]</sup> 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.<sup>[lx]</sup>

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.”<sup>[lxi]</sup> 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,”<sup>[vii]</sup> 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.

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

[xxxii] Ibid.

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

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

[xxxv] Ibid.

[xxxvi] *Happiness and Benevolence*, 177.

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

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

[xxxix] *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.

# Human Population and the Natural Environment: Old Questions, New Answers

CATHERINE PAKALUK

In 1798, Thomas Malthus problematized the question of human population growth relative to natural resources in his essay on the *Principle of Population*: “This natural inequality of the two powers of population and of production in the earth, and that great law of our nature which must constantly keep their effects equal, form the great difficulty that to me appears insurmountable in the way to the perfectibility of society.”[1] However, the difficulty that human population would outstrip food production never reached the predicted Malthusian crisis for two reasons. First, fertility rates did not increase after 1800, but rather slowed.[2] Second, due to advances in agricultural technology, the food supply increased, and there is today more food per capita than in any previous era.[3]

Theories that later based themselves on a Malthusian framework, such as Paul Ehrlich’s 1968 *Population Bomb*, speculated similarly that whatever the trends had been from 1800 through 1950, the *future ratio* of population growth to food production would become unsustainable, and would ultimately lead to mass starvation. Ehrlich argued that human fertility must decrease even further if human society were to flourish. However, the *Population Bomb* has been largely discredited—both by subsequent works of scholarship and nearly fifty years of counterfactual evidence.[4]

Since that time, with a change in emphasis, the environmental movement has been the primary inheritor of Malthusian-Ehrlichian rhetoric. Where Malthus highlighted the tension between *human population* and the *quality of human life*, the modern environmental movement has instead advanced a paradigm that sets *human population* in competition with the *quality of the natural environment*. This latter is aimed not at the problem of human flourishing, but at the problem of natural flourishing, understood to mean primarily the health and proliferation of plants, wildlife and various habitats.[5] To wit, “Since the early 1970s, many researchers have found correlations between [human] population size and impacts on resources including water, air, and plant and wildlife species.”[6] For this reason, activists working from within the environmental paradigm have tended to encourage limitations on human fertility and birth, like Erlich, considering birth control to be environmentally friendly.[7]

The picture has become gradually more complex, however. To begin with, chemical-hormonal contraceptives have come under scrutiny for emerging adverse effects of estrogenic compounds on both natural and human ecology.[8] Moreover, environmental scholars have begun to argue that the paradigm pitting human population against natural environment is itself overly simplistic regarding the true relationship between human and ecological populations. In the remainder of this essay, we draw attention to some contemporary studies that help to characterize more accurately the relationship between human population and environmental health.

~

In 2014, conservation biologists Mason Bradbury and Jianguo Liu from the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife at Michigan State University, together with M. Nils Peterson from the Fisheries, Wildlife, and

Conservation Biology Program at North Carolina State University, proposed a new equation for estimating the human impact on the environment.[9]

Where prior scholarly work estimated various models of the impact of human population *per se* on environmental outcomes, Bradbury, Liu, and Peterson found that the absolute number of households (and not the absolute number of people) was an equivalent, and in some cases better, predictor of environmental impact.[10] They observed that variation in the *grouping of people* into households determined consumption, waste, and impact.[11] Both the overall number of households and the average household size were predictive of the consumption of natural resources and environmental impact.

The importance of this discovery is clear given the recent observation that although “population growth...is slowing and even reversing in some places,”[12] this “has not translated into reducing human consumption of natural resources and impact on the environment.”[13] The authors state:

The number of households is often equal to, or better than, population at predicting CO2 emissions [...] fuelwood [...] per capita automobile use [...] and species endangerment. For example, *population growth accounted for only one-fourth of increased energy consumption in the 1970s and 1980s, whereas the remaining 3/4 was related to per capita increases driven largely by households.*” (Emphasis ours.) [14]

The figure above, that one-fourth of energy increase is due to population growth, while three-fourths is related to *per capita* increase in energy use, suggests that the driving force behind human impact on the environment is plausibly behavioral, namely, increased individual consumption of energy and other natural resources.

A reason for this is offered by one of the study’s co-authors, Jianguo Liu, a prolific environmental scholar, in a 2003 study: smaller households “demand more household products and have lower efficiency of resource use per person because fewer people share goods and services in smaller households.”[15] Liu suggests that researchers direct their efforts towards households because “households are basic socioeconomic units and share resources (e.g., energy, land, and water) among occupants.”[16]

Note that in the context of this research, a “small” household is one with fewer inhabitants, whereas in contrast a larger household has relatively more inhabitants. Observed variation in household size across regions and time is largely driven by sociological factors, such as grandparents living with children and grandchildren, older children living at home longer or moving out sooner, and not by variation in family size (e.g. number of children). Downward trends in family size have been remarkably stable and convergent—with total fertility rates continuing to decrease in every part of the globe.[17]

Along with the work on the lower efficiency of smaller households, scholars have also identified a trend that they term “household proliferation,” the fact that there are more households per person than there were in the past century. Liu gives an example to illustrate household proliferation: “If the average household size in 2000 (3.9 people per household) had remained at the 1985 level (4.4 people per household), there would have been 172 million fewer households in all countries combined by 2000. In other words, there were 172 million “extra” households due to the decline in the average household size alone.”[18]

Households are not an insignificant factor for the focus of environmental work. According to a study by Dietza et al, “direct energy use by households accounts for approximately 38% of overall US CO<sup>2</sup>

emissions, or 626 million metric tons of carbon (MtC) in 2005. This is approximately 8% of global emissions and larger than the emissions of any entire country except China.”[19]

Although there is not a comprehensive study demonstrating the relationship between household size and the efficient allocation of resources, such as decreased *per capita* consumption, there are several studies highlighting the ways in which larger households are more efficient.

A first consideration is the amount of land that household proliferation consumes. Smaller household size means that more houses are built per person, requiring more land use, more natural resources to build the house, and more infrastructure to support the spreading houses. Bradbury and his colleagues gave the following estimate for the amount of land used due to smaller households: “Assuming that each of the additional households occupies a 210 m<sup>2</sup> house ... then an additional 185,800 km<sup>2</sup> of housing area would be required. This estimate may be conservative because land area for household-related infrastructure (e.g., roads, yards, and retail) can require 2–4 times as much land as the actual land used for the home.”[20] But not only are the number of houses per person growing, the houses tend to be larger: “In addition to increasing numbers of households, the global trend is toward larger homes. In the United States, homes more than doubled in size between 1950 and 2002 ... In China, houses tripled in size with per capita floor space increasing ... between 1978 and 2002.”[21] Further, “sprawl,” or a decreased density of houses, has affected land conservation: “Rising affluence has also contributed to sprawl, which magnifies the environmental impacts of housing by virtue of low-density development patterns that require both more land and automobile-based transportation infrastructure.” [22]

In *Effects of Global Household Proliferation*, Liu argues that there are a great many negative effects of converting land to residential areas, including that it “reduces area for food production,” “pollutes water through release of household waste and changes hydrological cycles through land-use change,” “reduces area for production of fuel, wood, and fiber,” “destroys plants directly and indirectly,” “emits CO<sup>2</sup>,” “reduces areas (e.g., wetlands) for flood regulation,” “destroys organisms and habitat of organisms that can decompose waste and toxins,” “harms organisms that can purify water and air,” and more.[23]

A second consideration is the amount of energy, water, durable goods, and waste that is produced by the household unit. In a 2007 study, Liu and his co-author, Eunice Yu, found a clever way to measure the difference in use of resources. They studied the difference in uses of resources between married and divorced couples.[24] Their results were stunning. In terms of energy and resources, “in 2005, divorced households spent 46% and 56% more on electricity and water per person than married households. Divorced households in the U.S. could have saved more than 38 million rooms, 73 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity, and 627 billion gallons of water in 2005 alone if their resource-use efficiency had been comparable to married households.”[25] They also speculated that, “because of higher consumption per person, an individual in a divorced household may also generate more waste (solid, liquid, and gaseous material like greenhouse gases) that contributes to global environmental changes such as climate change and biodiversity loss... other studies show that waste per person increases with a decrease in household size.”[26] Since durable goods, such as large home appliances, are usually shared within a household, the authors of the 2014 study found that regular household goods also increase with household proliferation: “if the global trend toward household sizes of 2.5 continues, then at least 800 million additional durable household goods (e.g., televisions, refrigerators) would be needed *even without population growth*, assuming each household has one of each.”[27] (Emphasis ours.)

A third consideration of household proliferation and resource efficiency is automobile use. In his 2004 study of demographics and per capita environmental impact in transportation, Brant Liddle found that “in the U.S. as the size of a household increases the average miles driven per person in that household falls.”[28] Liddle’s study confirmed the more efficient use of transportation in large households, which is an important factor, especially considering that in the United States “cars and small trucks consumed between 75 and 80% of fuel used on highways from 1980 to 2000.”[29]

Taken together, households with fewer persons have less efficient use of resources including: land conservation; amount of energy, water, durable household goods, and waste that is produced by the household unit; and automobile use. Given these considerations of the environmental impacts of household proliferation, how big is this trend, and what are the main causes?

A first observation is that household numbers are growing much faster than population: “Among the 172 countries ... 136 countries (79 %) had faster increases in household numbers than population sizes during 1985–2000.”[30] Globally, households relative to persons increased by “12.6% from 1985 to 2000.”[31]

Several causes of household proliferation have been identified, including declining fertility, aging of the population, divorce, and young adults living independently. Among these, fertility has been surmised to be the greatest driver of smaller households. “Since 1950, fertility rates have fallen from 4.9 to 2.6 globally, falling 30–50 % in developed nations and over 200 % in developing nations other than those in sub-Saharan Africa.”[32]

As fertility rates are dropping, communities are also increasingly moving toward living as nuclear families instead of extended families since 1987.[33] This includes many among the elderly population who live alone: “Aging provides one explanation for why household sizes have continued to decline rapidly even in developed countries where fertility rates have been stable for decades”[34] because “older people are living longer and maintaining small households longer after their children move out of households.”[35]

At the same time, “the younger generation is contributing to household proliferation by leaving home sooner.” [36] This fact is especially clear in the United States where “since the 1940s, the percent of unmarried adult children living with their parents dropped from over 70–35% ... This new independent life stage created 6.7 million households for unmarried people in their 20s in the US.”[37]

A final contributor to smaller households is divorce. According to Liu, 15% of all household heads in the United States were divorced persons. In general, divorced households are 27-41% smaller than married households.[38] To give a sense of the scale, Liu uses an example: “If divorced households in the 12 study countries around 2000 had combined to have the same average household size as that of married households, there could have been 7.4 million fewer households.”[39]

Yet the question still remains, why are persons and communities making decisions that contribute to household proliferation? Some researchers suggest that it is a preference for privacy, while others claim that “rising incomes” and “relative importance of public and private household goods” are important factors.[40] Bradbury writes: “In addition to the factors discussed above, economic growth, and shifts in distribution of wealth should be evaluated as potential drivers of shifts in household size.”[41]

Taken together, these studies raise fascinating new questions about the evaluation of various lifestyle and behavioral choices—since household proliferation and size are primarily functions of these. It

would seem that if three-fourths of the increase in energy use has been a consequence of increased per capita consumption, then the most serious environmental impacts may be described as tragic consequences of human behaviors, and seemingly luxurious behaviors at that. Liu and his co-authors have stated that one goal of their research is “shifting the focus toward households [which] could facilitate movement from a human-versus-nature ethic to a humans-situated-within-nature ethic.”[42]

This approach seems highly complementary to that taken by Pope Francis, who ultimately locates environmental crises in a moral failure indicated by consumerism, overblown consumption and waste. He writes: “to blame population growth instead of extreme and selective consumerism on the part of some, is one way of refusing to face the issues. It is an attempt to legitimize the present model of distribution, where a minority believes that it has the right to consume in a way which can never be universalized, since the planet could not even contain the waste products of such consumption.”[43] Lessons deriving from recent environmental scholarship can provide practical guidelines for learning to be better stewards of creation.

*Catherine R. Pakaluk, PhD (Harvard, 2010) is Chair and Assistant Professor of Economics at Ave Maria University, as well as the Founder-Director of the Stein Center for Social Research.*

*Angela M. Winkels is a Junior Research Fellow at the Stein Center for Social Research, and a 2015 Summa Cum Laude graduate of Ave Maria University in Classics and Literature.*

---

## Endnotes

[1] Thomas Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (London: St. Paul’s Church-Yard, 1798), 5.

[2] Include data on TFRs in US as an example.

[3] Bjorn Lomborg, “The Truth About the Environment,” *The Economist*, April 2, 2001, <http://www.economist.com/node/718860>.

[4] Jonathan V. Last, “Paul Ehrlich: Even Worse than the New York Times Says He Is,” *The Weekly Standard*, June 2, 2015, <http://www.weeklystandard.com/print/paul-ehrlich-even-worse-than-the-new-york-times-says-he-is/article/962990>.

[5] Mason Bradbury, M. Nils Peterson, and Jianguo Liu, “Long-term dynamics of household size and their environmental implications,” *Popul Environ* 36 (2014):74. “An Essay on the Principle of Population (Malthus [1798] 1970; Wolman 2001). Ehrlich and Holdren helped frame concerns about the influence of human population on the environment with their famous model, I = PAT: where impact (I) = population (P) × affluence (A) × technology (T) (Ehrlich and Holdren 1971).”

[6] Ibid.

[7] Jessica Prois, “Voluntary Birth Control is a Climate Change Solution Nobody Wants to Talk About: A Growing Population means Greater Environmental Strain. The Solution Could be Rooted in Women’s Rights,” *Huffpost Impact*, December 10, 2015, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/birth-control-climate-change\\_us\\_565339cde4b0258edb322194](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/birth-control-climate-change_us_565339cde4b0258edb322194).

[8] Tim Worstall “Women on Contraceptive Pill Should Pay \$1,500 a Year More Tax” *Forbes*, June 3,

2012,

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/timworstall/2012/06/03/women-on-contraceptive-pill-should-pay-1500-a-year-more-tax/#2f7736315bfd>.

[9] Mason Bradbury, M. Nils Peterson, and Jianguo Liu “Long-term dynamics of household size and their environmental implications,” 73.

[10] Ibid., 74.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid. “Population growth, however, is slowing and even reversing in some places. Most of Europe, North America, and many developing nations including Brazil, China, Chile, and Costa Rica had birthrates below replacement levels in 2010 (at least 45 nations faced absolute declines in population size in 2010” (World Population Prospects: the 2008 Revision 2008).

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Eunice Yu and Jianguo Liu, “Environmental Impacts of Divorce” *PNAS* 104.51 (2007): 20629.

[17] See for instance “Fertility rate, total (births per woman)”,  
<http://beta.data.worldbank.org/?indicators=SP.DYN.TFRT.IN&view=chart>.

[18] Jianguo Liu, “Effects of Global Household Proliferation on Ecosystem Services,” in *Landscape Ecology for sustainable Environment and Culture* ed. Boji Fu and Bruce K. Jones (Netherlands: Springer, 2013),105.

[19] Thomas Dietza et al, “Household Actions can Provide a Behavioral Wedge to Rapidly Reduce US Carbon Emissions,” *PNAS* 106.4 (2009): 18456.

[20] Mason Bradbury, M. Nils Peterson, and Jianguo Liu “Long-term dynamics of household size and their environmental implications,” 81.

[21] Ibid, 82.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Jianguo Liu, “Effects of Global Household Proliferation on Ecosystem Services,” 108-109.

[24] For the sake of clarification, it should be stated that environmentalists are currently engaged in a debate about the environmental impact of divorce. Scholars such as Solveig Glestad Christiansen and Vegard Skirbekk have argued, in their 2015 article “Is Divorce Green? Energy use and marital dissolution” that although divorced couples do indeed consume more resources per capita, they have a lower fertility than married couples, and so ultimately have less environmental impact.

[25]Eunice Yu and Jianguo Liu, “Environmental Impacts of Divorce,” 20629.

[26] Ibid.,20632.

[27] Mason Bradbury, M. Nils Peterson, and Jianguo Liu “Long-term dynamics of household size and their environmental implications,” 81.

[28] Brant Liddle, “Demographic Dynamics and Per Capita Environmental Impact: Using Panel Regressions and Household Decompositions to Examine Population and Transport,” *Population and Environment*, 26.1 (2004): 25.

[29] *Ibid.*,36.

[30] Jianguo Liu, “Effects of Global Household Proliferation on Ecosystem Services,” 104.

[31] *Ibid.*

[32] Mason Bradbury, M. Nils Peterson, and Jianguo Liu “Long-term dynamics of household size and their environmental implications,” 78. N.B. Although in the short term declining fertility has been identified as the main driver of household proliferation, it is possible that declining fertility rates will lead to a decline in household numbers *in the long term*.

[33] *Ibid.*,76.

[34] *Ibid.*,78.

[35] *Ibid.*,80.

[36] *Ibid.*,80.

[37] *Ibid.*,80.

[38] *Ibid.*,80.

[39] Eunice Yu and Jianguo Liu, “Environmental Impacts of Divorce,” 20630.

[40] Mason Bradbury, M. Nils Peterson, and Jianguo Liu “Long-term dynamics of household size and their environmental implications,” 80.

[41] *Ibid.*, 80.

[42] M Nils Peterson et al, Liu, “A Household Perspective for Biodiversity Conservation,” *The Journal of Wildlife Management*, 71.4 (2007): 1243.

[43] *Ibid.*, 50.

# A Better Deal: Sustainable Trading

SOPHIE CALDECOTT

For the majority of my life I'd never knowingly met a climate change skeptic. I generally move in the kind of circles where it's taken for granted that we would care about the environment and want to do our bit to minimize our negative impact on the world around us. In my world, buying fairly traded and organic products isn't necessarily something we can afford to do all the time, but it's definitely something we'd like to do all the time. We recycle, try to turn the lights off when we're not using them, unplug our chargers from the wall when we're finished with them, and try not to waste water.

I grew up in England, where we were taught about climate change and other environmental issues from an early age. I recently rediscovered an old journal from when I was around 7 or 8 years old, with a note that said: "If I was the government, I would ban all the cars and everyone would use horses and carriages so that there wasn't any pollution and horrible noise." (Well, at least that was the general thrust of it—the spelling was a little iffy.)

For me, there has never been a tension between my Catholic faith and my interest in sustainability and [ethical consumerism](#); in fact, they're such a natural fit that I would say my Catholic faith enriches and informs my desire to buy fairly traded and eco-friendly products, to live a life that has as low an impact on the environment as possible. It was only relatively recently that I realized just how normal it is for some Catholics, especially Americans, to be suspicious of talk of "conscious consumerism" and "being green".

In 2013 I gave a talk at World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro at an event organized by the Catholic environmental organization, Creatio, on behalf of my late father, Stratford Caldecott, who couldn't travel due to his advanced cancer. Our goal was to show the young Catholics at the event that environmental sustainability is—or should be—a huge part of Catholic life. We wanted to reclaim the conversation from secularists who are obsessed with population control and think that the world would be better off if humans didn't exist.

The extreme secular attitude to climate change and ecology could be represented by this short and snappy quote from the environmental organization Greenpeace: "The earth is 4.6 billion years old. Scaling to 46 years, humans have been here for 4 hours, the industrial revolution began 1 minute ago, and in that time, we've destroyed more than half the world's forests." [i] Humans, in other words, are the enemy of the earth. As a very visibly pregnant 25-year-old, I was a physical embodiment of the difference between Catholic and secular attitudes towards the environment, a sign it is possible to believe humans have a duty and responsibility to care for the physical world around us while at the same time believing that humans are part of the solution as well as the problem. God looked at all of his creation, humans included, and declared us to be good.

Pope Francis has caused a stir with his radical attitude towards the environment and social ethics. At his inaugural Mass, he asked us to become "protectors of creation, protectors of God's plan inscribed in nature, protectors of one another and of the environment." As his papacy has progressed he has reminded over and over again that, as he put it via his Twitter account in 2013, "Care of creation is not just something God spoke of at the dawn of history: he entrusts it to each of us as part of his plan."

Though the media often presents Francis as the first pope to take such an interest in environmental issues and social justice, he is in fact in continuity with the legacy of John Paul II and Benedict XVI. As my father wrote in our talk for Rio in 2013, Pope John Paul II's teaching on *The Theology of the Body* has a lot more to do with ecology and social ethics than most people realize: "The Church's teaching on the environment and on the human body, on cherishing the natural world and cherishing our human nature, belong together. They cannot be separated."

If we see our bodies in the context of *The Theology of the Body*, as physical realities that mirror the divine nature, doesn't this mean that the material, physical world around us (though fallen) also reflects God's nature? While sex is good and concupiscence is the sin that distorts this good, isn't respect for the material realm essentially good, yet greed, consumerism, and a lust for possessions a distortion of this good? The Albigensian heretics despised their bodies, all sexual desire and physical things as being "of the world" and therefore essentially evil. This kind of thinking has arisen again and again throughout the history of the Church, and we have to see it for what it is: a heresy.

Consumerism isn't really a love of the objective material world: that is to say the world God created and entrusted to us. Consumerism is the illusion that we own that world and that we can help ourselves to any aspect of it, in any way we see fit. That we can describe it and market it to ourselves, knowing what's good and what's evil, without reference to the bigger picture. Even our charity can become tainted with this kind of consumerism. There's a hypocrisy in saying that you care for the poor, the downtrodden of society, and then not thinking about where your clothing has come from, who made it.

Catholic social teaching—with which *Laudato si'* is in strong continuity—contains resources which could bring about a deep transformation of this situation. Distributism, localism, subsidiarity—all these are eco-friendly contributions that we can make to the debate. Slow living, seasonal eating, celebrating and respecting craftsmanship: all of these are or should be part of the Catholic ethos. Renewed interest in the Guilds—that Medieval form of social organisation—draws on Catholic cultural resources. It's only since the industrial revolution that the manual worker and laborer has become disdained, considered the lowest of society, cogs in a machine rather than the skilled crafts people who were respected for their unique talents and viewed as an essential part of society.

We have a heavier responsibility than any other species to protect and cooperate with the world around us. In fact, Genesis tells us that this is what we were created for: "God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it." That vocation to cultivate and look after the earth continues after our exile from the Garden of Eden: that is, after we began to sin. All that changed was that the job became more difficult. God told Adam: "Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plants of the field" (Gen 3:17-18).

As my father wrote, "we need a humanistic ecological vision that takes account of the special nature of human beings, as well as the ecosystem in which we belong." This vision, as Pope Benedict said, should take in "not only the environment but also life, sexuality, marriage, the family, social relations". That is, our "duties towards the human person". [ii] For all these things are part of what we mean by the nature of human beings. We are social by nature. We are born into families. We find meaning in our lives through loving and serving others. We have a dignity that can be expressed in the form of rights and duties.

Pope Benedict taught that Christianity tries to balance the value of the human person with the value of nature as God's creation. The Book of Genesis—as well as the Psalms and many other parts of the Bible, which praise the glories of nature—teach Christians to be responsible and gentle and wise in the way

we behave towards the world around us. The virtue of Prudence instructs us to take special care to preserve the natural resources on which our lives and those of our children depend. The other three “cardinal virtues” that are part of the Christian life are just as relevant. Temperance tells us that we must not become greedy, addicted to consumption, living a lifestyle that depends on having more and more. The virtue of Justice reminds us that many of us in the richer countries of the world support our lifestyle at the expense of the poorer countries. And we need the virtue of Fortitude or Courage to strengthen us for what we have to do: to find ways to change the way we live, to be kinder to the earth, fairer to our fellow human beings, and merciful towards the animals and plants that God has created out of his love and wisdom.

Pope Francis condemned our culture’s unrestrained greed in a speech that he made on the UN World Environment Day in 2013, saying: “Man is not in charge today, money is in charge, money rules. God our Father did not give the task of caring for the earth to money, but to us, to men and women: we have this task! Instead, men and women are sacrificed to the idols of profit and consumption: it is the ‘culture of waste.’”[iii] It is our duty as Christians to find ways out of this culture of waste that we have created. And it is Christian virtues which power this search: in the first place, a love of truth. So let’s look at some hard facts.

In 1960, according to the US Environmental Protection Agency, the United States produced approximately 88 million tons of municipal waste. By 2010 that number had risen to just under 250 million tons. This jump reflects an almost 184 percent increase in what Americans throw out, even though the population increased by only 60 percent. Everything we buy these days is produced to be cheap and not to last, wrapped in layers of **plastic packaging** that more often than not ends up in landfill sites.

As a culture we seek quick fixes and easy options, but these quick fixes are costing the planet—and subsequently future generations—a lot. The **production of clothes**, for example, has a major impact upon human lives as well as the environment, for the most part not seen or considered by the average shopper. Once again, we see that the environmental and human elements cannot be separated. The World Health Organization believes that around 20,000 farmers in developing countries die a year as a result of agricultural pesticides used in cotton farming.

And here’s another hard fact. Respect for the human person, including the human body, cannot be divorced from respect for nature or social justice. In his speech to the German Bundestag in September 2011 called “The Listening Heart”, Pope Benedict reminded us of this. “We must listen to the language of nature and we must answer accordingly. Yet I would like to underline a point that seems to me to be neglected, today as in the past: there is also an ecology of man. Man too has a nature that he must respect and that he cannot manipulate at will. Man is not merely self-creating freedom. Man does not create himself.”[iv]

Saint John Paul’s Theology of the Body is all about what we find when we understand our own nature as created by God. We need to pay attention to the “spousal” or “nuptial” meaning of the body, the fact that we were made for love, and that there is a “way of living the body” in its authentic masculinity and femininity. This nuptial meaning has been limited, violated and deformed over time and by modern culture, until we have almost lost the power of seeing it, but it is still there to be discovered with the help of grace, like a spark deep within the human heart. The “language of the body” is part of that “language of nature” that Pope Benedict speaks of. The way we live, the clothes we buy and wear, the work we do, the way we treat each other, and, yes, the way we treat animals and the whole of nature, should reflect our understanding of that language: the fact that we are put here not to destroy and

exploit but to love and cooperate.

In our families we must draw on the love that opens our eyes to reality, as Pope Francis says in his encyclical *Lumen Fidei*: “Faith knows because it is tied to love, because love itself brings enlightenment. Faith’s understanding is born when we receive the immense love of God which transforms us inwardly and enables us to see reality with new eyes”[v]. In turn, by revealing the love of God the Creator, faith “enables us to respect nature all the more, and to discern in it a grammar written by the hand of God and a dwelling place entrusted to our protection and care. Faith also helps us to devise models of development which are based not simply on utility and profit, but consider creation as a gift for which we are all indebted”[vi].

All of this drove me to create a website called [A Better Place Journal](http://www.abetterplacejournal.com). In the first place, I wanted to make conscious consumerism easier and more accessible to the average person. Even the simplest consumer choices we make every day matter, and have the potential to impact other people’s lives. Everything is connected. We need to train ourselves to live up to our calling to be better stewards of creation. But the motivation to do this, for those who are not convinced by religious arguments, is founded in a greater appreciation of beauty and durability, and right relations between people: those who produce, and those who trade with them. Starting with the material realm, with the fact that people need to clothe themselves and care for their homes, I believe we can communicate a vision that all can appreciate. A vision that says, we may not be able to save the world, but we can at least make it a better place.

*Sophie Caldecott is a journalist and mother. She works for Verily Magazine, blogs at <https://sophiecaldecott.wordpress.com> and runs her own website, [www.abetterplacejournal.com](http://www.abetterplacejournal.com).*

---

[i] <http://greenpeaceusa.tumblr.com/post/93508666790/the-earth-is-46-billion-years-old-scaling-to-46>.

[ii] Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 51.

[iii] <http://en.radiovaticana.va/storico/2013/06/05/pope...>

[iv] <https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/spee...>

[v] *Lumen Fidei*, 26.

[vi] *Ibid.*, 55.

# Thanks Be to God

MICHAEL GALDO

For the fruit of all creation,  
Thanks be to God.  
Gifts bestowed on every nation,  
Thanks be to God.  
For the plowing, sowing, reaping,  
Silent growth while we are sleeping,  
Future needs in earth's safekeeping,  
Thanks be to God.  
—Fred Pratt Green

The lyrics of the well-worn hymn may seem trite, yet anyone who has spent time plowing, sowing, and reaping can attest that its words, though simple, speak of one of the very fundamental truths of man's relationship to the land and to the Creator: that is, they speak of the gift of faith. My family is blessed to share our four acres with a small collection of farm animals with which we try to live out this gift of faith through plowing, sowing, and reaping.

Our story is not unique. We migrated gradually from suburbia, moving ever closer to the country, until we finally made our home among horse pastures and fields of grain. It seems that many in our rural Virginia community have followed a similar path and now find themselves with a yard full of farm animals. In our neighborhood alone I can list a few: a school principal who raises chickens and pigs, a computer tech with turkeys and hogs, a property manager who also grows Christmas trees. This seems to be a new paradigm for family life in the country: dad works a 9<sup>05</sup> job and the family at home helps to run a small farm on the side.

We could discuss cost and overhead, the cost of chicken feed, the weight of a butchered animal and price per pound once the meat is in the freezer, but I don't believe the attraction to this life is rooted in financial cost benefit. Rather, it is here on a small family farm that we are touched by the most basic fundamentals of life and death. The thrill of a mother goat throwing (that's farm language for birthing) twin kids and the disappointment when one kid dies because mama goat rejected him and left him in the cold overnight. The frustration when the goats escape through an unlocked fence and, in a matter of minutes, destroy days' worth of work in the garden. The steady rhythm of life, waking up to the sound of a cock crowing 30 minutes before sunup, every day. The reality that if you don't milk those dairy goats every day, they will quickly dry up and you won't have milk for the rest of the year. Nature is a tough, but very good teacher.

I purchased our first hen at the end of winter, a slow time for egg-laying. I was told to wait until the days surpassed the nights in length and promised that she would then begin laying. That day came and went, and still no eggs. I let her roam about the yard and every day became a mini egg hunt, checking all the bushes and cubbies around the barn, but the result was always the same—no eggs. In anger, I decided to stop feeding her: no eggs—no food. She could forage. A few days after that, she disappeared. For nearly a week I worried and looked for that hen, but saw no sign of her. I had given her up for lost when she suddenly reappeared, walking around the yard as if she had been there all along. I watched

her for some time and found her heading to a bush by the side of the house. There, in a window well, I found the reason for her disappearance: she was sitting on a clutch of nineteen blue eggs. Yes, you read that correctly, chicken eggs can be blue. Because of moments like these I find it impossible to be an atheist. All I wanted was a bunch of eggs to fry, but in spite of all I did, I was given something much greater. That hen hatched those eggs for us and, instead of omelets for Easter, we had peeps.

We have only been here for three years, and yet even in this short time, the land has become part of us, not like a possession that threatens to own you if you don't maintain a level of detachment, but rather like an orchestra working harmoniously with its conductor. Without the conductor, the orchestra struggles to be of one mind and cannot stay together, nor can it have a vision greater than the individual instrumental part sitting before each player. The conductor sets the pace—he holds the score—and yet he knows that without the workings of each player he is nothing: A conductor in an empty room is no conductor at all. All the while, the conductor points to one greater than himself: the divine composer, by whose score we all are reading. Here, the land and the animals become players who practice their parts and work according to their design. As I have gotten to know them, I see how much they do on their own, unaided. How does the doe turn grass and brush into smooth, creamy milk? How does the chicken, so mysteriously sneak into the barn and lay an egg, nearly every day? Man cannot create milk from grass, eggs from worms. If I stop to look at it, this world reveals one hidden miracle after another. If the sky happens to be clear when I go out to the silent world and check on the animals at night, I gaze up at the stars and imagine Abram receiving his covenant from the Lord, and I wonder what kind of faith it must have taken for a man of seventy-five years to leave his land. And I have only been here three years.

At this time of year, in the middle of the winter, we are on hiatus from milking the goats—they need to rest physically before birthing again in the spring. The land has lost its green, and it too rests. Silently it waits for spring. Traditionally, it is this time of year for which the family worked all summer on the farm: the storing up of food and fuel for winter. This is a time in which we trust to divine providence for our future welfare, and yet we recognize that providence requests our cooperation. For our family, the hay is stacked in the barn, enough to get the animals through the winter; the firewood is split and ready to be burned.

We look forward to the spring, thanks be to God.

*Michael Galdo is the Director of Sacred Music at St. Francis de Sales parish in Purcellville, Virginia and tends a small herd of sheep and goats at his home in nearby Lovettsville with his wife Carla and four children.*

# Bigger is Not Always Better

ALEXANDER BINDER

**Ernest F. Schumacher**, *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered* (Harper Perennial, 2010).

Ernest F. Schumacher wrote *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered* over forty years ago, but if you didn't know that, you might think it was published last year. Schumacher's *magnum opus* is still quite useful and necessary today, a fact that would likely cause him greater anxiety than he must have felt when writing it. Outside of this seminal work, Schumacher is most known for his role as the Chief Economic Advisor to the British National Coal Board (1950–1970), for being a protégé of the famous economist John M. Keynes, and for his promotion of Buddhist economics. However, it is less well-known that Schumacher converted to Catholicism shortly before completing *Small is Beautiful*. Each of these facts clearly influence this great work.

Schumacher begins his collection of essays by describing the problems facing the modern world. Chief among those which concern him are the abuse and degradation of humanity and the environment in the name of “giantism,” a combination of the notions that “growth is good” and “bigger is better.” He invokes and then rebukes the vision of his former mentor, Keynes, who argued that future generations would be freed from the burden of work, so long as the motivating forces of greed and envy were employed to increase production for just a little while longer. Schumacher contends that vice could never be a pathway to peace and prosperity; that the cultivation and expansion of needs merely adds to the slavery of mankind; and economic growth, which has no discernible limit, is rushing headlong into unsustainability. Indeed, Keynes's vision of prosperity for all without (much) work has not yet come to pass and mankind is still struggling with the apparent incompatibility of economic growth and sustainability.

Behind the ideology of economic-growth-at-all-costs, there lies an economic theory built on a philosophy of materialism posing as a “pure science.” Schumacher rightly recognized that the influence of the “religion of economics” was far-reaching and had convinced many that “proper” or “rational” thinking means consuming more stuff—that is, the more goods one consumes, the happier one is. But for Schumacher, economic thinking reverses means and ends, preventing persons from choosing their own ends; and it further tends to reduce priceless non-economic values—which are irreducibly sacred—to a monetary price. Schumacher therefore levels a major philosophical challenge to economics, questioning the entire project of modern economic theory based on a meta-economic conception of man devoid of his humanity, indistinguishable from mindless atoms.

This religion of economics treats all resources as “factors” of production—as mere means to the end of more goods and services. Yet, Schumacher argues, two resources in particular—education and land—cannot be thought of as mere factors of production because they are ends in themselves. Economists and businessmen value know-how, the capacity to use knowledge to make more stuff, and though know-how is important, Schumacher thought an education of the metaphysical, of the meaning

and purpose of life, is far more important.

Likewise, the use of land is primarily a metaphysical and not a technical or economic problem. For Schumacher, land is sacred and an end in itself, because it too was created by God. Therefore the management of land should be oriented to health, beauty, and permanence, not just productivity; productivity would follow, but it is not the primary end of land. Working directly with the land keeps man in touch with nature, humanizes his habitat, and provides him with essential goods for a dignifying existence.

Industrial resources and technology, though useful, must also be used to serve the purposes of man and not subvert him into becoming a mere cog in the machine. Of the industrial, man-made resources, Schumacher sees energy as primary because it is a pre-condition for all other industrial resources and, moreover, energy cannot be recycled. Yet, energy production in Schumacher's time (and still largely today) is carried on by the "law of least cost" without much concern for its sustainability. Schumacher was particularly alarmed by the increasing adoption of nuclear energy which threatened the lives of many in the name of increased and cheaper energy. He would not live to see the Three Mile Island and Chernobyl accidents that vindicated him.

Schumacher's view of the relationship between technology and poverty is that technology increases man's productivity, thus alleviating his burden, but cannot ultimately solve poverty because it also tends to replace the good, productive, and creative work that humans do. Mass production does not enrich man, but empties him. In contrast, economists in Schumacher's day called for the transfer of mass production techniques to impoverished countries, techniques completely unsuited to the people and conditions in those countries. Schumacher pioneered the idea of "intermediate technologies," which would benefit the local workforce by assisting them with their current production rather than displacing them, and do not make poorer nations ever more dependent on wealthy nations, thus resisting a modern form of colonialism.

The baseline of Schumacher's thought is that true development does not start with goods, but with people and their education, organization, and discipline. Production by the masses, with the aid of intermediate technology, is the surest way to alleviate the mass poverty found in many parts of the globe. People are the primary source of wealth and must be given the opportunity to provide for themselves. Workplaces need to be created in areas where people live, implementing simple (but not necessarily old) production techniques to match the skill set of that people, and using local materials to produce goods for local use. Here, Schumacher provides the quote for which his book is named: "Man is small, and, therefore, small is beautiful. To go for giantism is to go for self-destruction" (169).

For modern industrial economies the fundamental task is to achieve smallness within large-scale organization. To this end, Schumacher proposes the principle of subsidiarity and quotes Pope Pius XI to explain this principle for governance. Yet somewhat surprisingly, Schumacher goes on to support socialism, which Pius XI rejected as fundamentally incompatible with Christianity. However, in Schumacher's view it is possible to reconcile these seemingly irreconcilable positions, as he does not propose eliminating private property, nor does he propose complete public ownership of property.

Schumacher agrees with economic historian and Christian socialist, R. H. Tawney, that no change in any economic system can avert the social ills of greed, selfishness, and combativeness, but he also insists that the current system of private enterprise and its need for limitless growth is incompatible with the finitude of the environment. Three choices face society: private or public ownership, markets or planning, and freedom or totalitarianism. Schumacher rejects the commonly asserted false dichotomy between, on the one hand, private ownership, markets and freedom and, on the other,

public ownership, planning and totalitarianism. Instead, he believes each of the three choices can be made separately, for example proposing a rather radical plan of nationalizing ownership in large-scale enterprises, invoking the Scott Bader commonwealth as a fine example. Schumacher's specific plan is quite detailed, but the general idea is that in place of taxing company profits, the local government would take ownership of half the large-scale company, but maintain no voting rights. "The purpose would be to maximize both the degree of decentralization of public participation and the integration of business enterprises with the social organism within which they operate" (306). He recognized that his plan was radical and would require well-defined rules with proper intent, but did not consider the obstacles too great as compared to the need for an alternative system.

Four decades later, modern economies are still growing and using up resources with little concern for the environment. This problem is serious enough that Pope Francis dedicated his encyclical *Laudato si'* to the subject, echoing much of what Schumacher had written so long ago. In this way, *Small is Beautiful* is as relevant as ever. However, Schumacher himself was not the first to make these arguments, and won't be the last. So far, environmental disaster and resource depletion has largely been averted through ever improving technology, but the question of sustainability in a finite world remains.

Economic theory also remains largely unchanged since Schumacher's time, despite calls for revisions of its most basic curriculum after the financial crisis of 2008. The underlying materialist philosophy and the neglect of consideration of the metaphysical in the name of "pure science" remain key characteristics of orthodox economics. Man also continues to be alienated and subjugated by the technology and capital used in mass production, and still finds no fulfillment in mass consumption.

Mass production for export remains a dominant approach for developing nations. And while some of these nations have witnessed incredible growth in production, massive poverty is still readily found in urban and rural areas across the globe.

Schumacher's dream of development through intermediate technology remains largely untried. Likewise, decentralized public ownership of large scale enterprises is not considered a serious idea in nations dominated by the private enterprise system. In other words, the philosophies of materialism and giantism rule the day now as much as they ever did. Their failures make it all the more necessary to heed Schumacher's call for smallness, which is still beautiful.

*Alexander Binder is a visiting instructor at Franklin & Marshall College and a doctoral candidate in Economics at the University of Missouri-Kansas City.*

# Poverty and the Simple Life

CARLA GALDO

**Thomas DuBay S.M.**, *Happy Are Your Poor: The Simple Life and Spiritual Freedom* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1981, 2nd ed. 2003 ).

Father Thomas Dubay's book *Happy Are You Poor: The Simple Life and Spiritual Freedom* is a simply-written book which can—and probably should—be searingly difficult to read. Even the most thrifty first-world readers will likely be convicted that they are, in many ways, like the camel that is unable to fit through the eye of the needle, comfortably consumed by the pursuit of things, money, and security, with a less-than-proper regard for the needy and impoverished. As a widely traveled conference and retreat speaker, spiritual director, and author, Fr. Dubay was well-familiar with the lifestyles of religious and lay Catholics throughout the country and even the world, and he observed that both parishes and religious communities seemed to be suffering from what he considered to be a problematic disregard for the Gospel teaching on poverty. He wanted to kindle a flame in the hearts of Catholics who already consider themselves to be sincere adherents to their faith, inspiring them to a deeper self-examination regarding their use of, and attachment to, material goods.

In the secular arena these days, simplicity sells. Magazines, books, and blogs proliferate with techniques and tips to help moderns awash in too much stuff achieve a more pared-down lifestyle. *Happy Are You Poor* is not a how-to manual, however. It is, instead, a systematic outline of a Christian's proper relationship to material goods, whether they be lay, cleric, or religious. Dubay considered his analysis to be a distillation of the New Testament's teachings and stated confidently that anyone who disagrees needs to debate with the Scriptures themselves rather than with his analysis.

Given the innate human distaste for filth and utter squalor, which is often the image that comes to mind when considering "poverty," the book first takes the important step of clarifying what Gospel poverty is *not*. The ideal of poverty enshrined in the Gospel is not that of destitution—indeed much of the texts on the poor involve the rich giving what they do not need to the poor to free them from the prison of their destitution. It is also not a stoic insensitivity to that which is beautiful or good for human health. Gospel poverty, is, at the same time, not merely economizing in one's use of money and goods, or even a healthy detachment from these goods. Both are important and admirable qualities, but might be considered only stepping-stones on the way to authentic Gospel poverty. Dubay also disagrees with those who suggest the poverty of the Gospel should be "reinterpreted" away from literal frugal living and towards a more analogical impoverishment of generosity with time and talent, or simply being good stewards of creation.

The secular heralds of minimalism and of clean, attractive, simple living, might seem to be in agreement with the idea that the "simple life" referred to in the title of this book brings freedom. Yet it seems that simplicity embraced entirely for the sake of cleaner surfaces and clearer spaces is overly self-focused. "Fold your socks, tidy your toys, purge your closets, and *YOUR* life will be better, freer, and easier," reads the gospel according to *Simple*. But, as Father Dubay points out, the life of a follower and

imitator of Christ is essentially other-focused. If I pare down my life, according to the ways of the Gospel, it is not done simply for the sake of me, myself, and I. Gospel poverty is a lifestyle lived *for the sake of the other*—whether that other be God or man. First and foremost, material simplicity should enable a radical openness to God and a readiness to respond to His inspirations that is difficult to achieve when one is weighed down by vain concerns regarding passing styles or world-impressing accessories. “God,” notes Fr. Dubay, “forces himself on no one. If I cling to things, he lets me have my things. If I am empty of things, he fills me with himself” (164). Further, a sparing and modest use of food, clothing, and shelter enables a sharing of resources, time and talent with the poor. Finally, “to be credible in our modern age, a person must visibly demonstrate personal integrity in the small details of everyday life” (73). One’s detachment from the things of this world speaks more eloquently than many words regarding the reality of eternal communion with God, and how to orient a life in that direction.

In lieu of personal experiences—Dubay gives no anecdotal sketches of what his own closets or shelves look like—the book provides extensive lists of questions that serve as personal examens, and that can be applicable to the laity, clergy, and religious alike. This is significant—the author insists that there is no distinction in the Gospel call to poverty for these different states of life, although there may be different levels of radicality appropriate to each. The use of questions rather than personal anecdotes also allows the book to be less an authorial self-enshrinement and more a springboard into prayer and consultation with the Holy Spirit, for the reader interested in sincere self-reform. The closest the book gets to practicalities is through the examples of the saints whose lives are described as illustrations of how to live Gospel poverty in a variety of circumstances.

As a sincere and open reader myself, this book stands as a healthy challenge to my attachments and my desire to cling to self-serving superfluities and pleasures. Yet, as a wife and mother, concerned with the day-to-day survival and flourishing of four children under age nine plus one busy husband, I feel that I am frequently immersed in only material concerns—ensuring everyone has clothes that fit, meals that nourish, books that teach well, a house that’s clean. In my busyness I am more often tempted not by vain displays of elegance but by unthinking, uncaring utilitarianism. It’s simpler to throw a weekday meal on the table than to celebrate a saint’s feast day with thoughtfully arrayed dishes and a special treat. It’s easier to dress down for Mass than to dress up in more costly clothes that might be stained or torn. It’s significantly cheaper—in terms of both time and money—to send my children to public school, rather than to purchase our own carefully considered books and curricula in order to pursue an education at home. I could possibly deceive myself, with an incorrect reading of Gospel poverty, that a desire for the simple life would dictate the clear answer to these alternatives. But the simpler, easier, and cheaper choices in these situations, and others that come up every day, is not always the best. Right now, what this mother needs most of all is guidance for a heart that must often discern between appropriate, nurturing, inspiring beauty and that which is superfluous and unnecessary. Dubay’s book begins to speak to this, but it is not a fully fleshed-out answer to this particular dilemma.

*Carla Galdo, a graduate of the John Paul II Institute, lives with her husband, three sons and daughter in Lovettsville, Virginia.*

# The Global and the Local

JOHN LARACY

**William T. Cavanaugh**, *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008 ).

In asking about how human beings should relate to the material world, Christians today must reckon with the problems posed by the rise of global capitalism. Are we for or against “consumerism,” “globalization,” and the “free market”? Are these social realities—and, indeed, the phrases themselves—superficial or meaningful, malicious or benign? William Cavanaugh’s brief but effective *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire* deals with these questions by challenging the prevailing assumptions of contemporary economics, as instantiated in our everyday lives. It should be of interest to Christian economists and businessmen, as well as theologians and non-specialists, since Cavanaugh, a professor in Catholic Studies at DePaul University, skillfully interweaves lucid theology, popular economics, and anecdotal journalism. But those in search of large-scale, fast-acting political solutions to today’s economic ills will find none here. Hoping his book will contribute “to a kind of theological microeconomics” (viii), Cavanaugh thus indicates his preference for local Christian charity over large-scale enterprise. Each of the book’s four chapters presents a key presupposition of consumer culture; unveils its ethical implications; subjects it to theological critique; and then proposes alternative Christian attitudes and practices.

Chapter 1, titled “Freedom and Unfreedom,” challenges “free market” ideology by asking about the meaning of freedom. In other words, when is a market truly free? Prominent defenders of the “free market” like Nobel laureate Milton Friedman define freedom in purely negative fashion, that is, as the individual’s freedom *from* outside forces: “All that matters for a market to be free is that individuals have real wants and can pursue them without the interference of others, especially the state” (7). This typical approach remains agnostic about disparities in power and abstracts from the prospect of a shared social end or common good. Yet by reference to statistics, business literature, and advertising trends, Cavanaugh shows how this ideal of unconstrained choice goes hand-in-hand with the dominance of impersonal forces like mass advertising, which attempts to manipulate undirected and unconstrained consumer desire. Additionally, managers feel compelled to maximize the disparity between employer and employee for the sake of higher profit: “it is assumed that the consumer will want to maximize his or her own power at the expense of the laborer, and the manager does not feel free to resist this logic” (22). Appealing to St. Augustine, Cavanaugh thus shows how the putative “freedom” of consumerism and free market ideology is more akin to “the tyranny of our own wills” (11). Because authentic human freedom is directed to communion with God, as its ultimate end, it requires “a community of virtue,” which teaches us how to “desire rightly” (9). Accordingly, authentically free markets and good business practices will promote the common good by sanctioning the just distribution of property, to the mutual benefit of employer and employee, buyer and seller. Cavanaugh cites real examples of small businesses that successfully follow such practices, yet he believes “it would be counterproductive to expect the state to impose such a direction on economic activity” (32).

Chapter 2, titled “Detachment and Attachment,” rethinks the cliché that consumer culture is characterized by “inordinate attachment to money and things” (34). More precisely, it is characterized by a restless *detachment* from material things, none of which satisfies us. While Christianity espouses detachment from material things for the sake of attachment to Christ and to other persons, global consumerism espouses detachment from material reality for the sake of more and more consumption. The General Motors people have called this “the organized creation of dissatisfaction” (46). Separate from concrete production, most consumers are unfamiliar with how products are made and who made them—which Cavanaugh correlates with job dissatisfaction and a fleeting emotional relation to products, driven by advertising, rather than by product quality or trust between buyer and seller. The worst result is injustice for hidden sweatshop workers, to whom the transcendent corporation pays as little as possible: “We shop; they drop” (41). Based on his view of Eucharistic consumption—whereby each person receives a unique share in the body of Christ—Cavanaugh recommends practices that affirm personal dignity: making things ourselves to gain an appreciation for human labor; donating time and money to those in need; using community-oriented banks; buying local or “fair trade” products. Cavanaugh fails to explore noteworthy objections in this chapter: e.g., can large families typically afford his recommended practices? Are sweatshop jobs better than no jobs at all in the poorest regions?

While covering the same cultural problems, Chapter 3, titled “The Global and the Local,” includes the book’s fullest theological critique. It treats the relation of the global and the local as a variation on the classical metaphysical problem of how the universal relates to the particular. In global consumerism, “universalization and fragmentation are two sides of the same coin” (61), for a homogenized economic system produces a plethora of superficial differences, void of meaningful unity. McDonald’s can be seen as the great symbol of this consumerist metaphysics: always trying to give the appearance of novelty by changing sizes or sauces, yet remaining the same mediocre hamburger everywhere. Cavanaugh insightfully connects this global consumerism to both “multiculturalism”—which “subjects every culture to the withering hegemony of cultural relativism and individual choice” (68)—and to postmodernism, for which only “the surface image counts” (69). As a Christian alternative, Cavanaugh presents Hans Urs von Balthasar’s notion that Jesus Christ is the “Concrete Universal”: the Triune God embraces the particularities of human history, including each person, in and through Christ’s concrete human nature. Based on Balthasar’s claim that Christ calls each person to a unique participation in his salvific mission, Cavanaugh argues, “The Christian is called not to replace one universal system with another, but to attempt to ‘realize’ the universal body of Christ in every particular exchange” (88). No doubt this is basically right. Still, Cavanaugh might have paid attention to Balthasar’s claim that God’s tri-personal Spirit is present in objective institutions, including the sacrament of marriage (see Balthasar’s essay “Spirit and Institution”). Perhaps just political and economic institutions can make mutual love intrinsic to economic exchanges, thus easing the burden of constant individual responsibility—just as the sacramental institution of marriage makes mutual love intrinsic to the interactions between husband and wife.

Chapter 4, titled “Scarcity and Abundance,” challenges the conventional view that free-market trade is based on a scarcity of resources: I give up something in order to get something else. Examining the classical economics of Adam Smith, Cavanaugh shows how this view “implies that goods are not held in common” and that consumption “is essentially a private experience” (91). Against Smith’s central claim that trade motivated by self-interest will produce excess wealth to the benefit of all, Cavanaugh describes, in compellingly concrete terms, what this view actually amounts to: “The consumer’s low, low prices at Wal-Mart means low, low wages for the people in Asia who make the products we buy” (94). By contrast, the 700 businesses under the umbrella of The Economy of Communion Project, founded by the Focolare movement in the Catholic Church, give part of their profits to the poor in their

midst, while viewing these recipients as active participants who can help the business in turn. Such mutual giving, which establishes economic communion, emerges out of the abundance of God's self-giving to us.

Eight years after this book's publication, its illuminating theological critique of global consumerism remains more relevant than ever, even as its "small-is-beautiful" approach has become more commonplace where disillusionment has set in. A general tendency of this approach, to which Cavanaugh succumbs, is to eschew any explicit hope for large-scale institutional change and, indeed, to imply that large institutions are the very problem. Often connected to such a bias against large institutions is an anti-family tendency, including an emphasis on individualistic minimalism over against the gratuity of shared being. To his credit, Cavanaugh's Eucharist-centered vision does not succumb to these latter tendencies. Still, a more ample approach would include a robust political philosophy, one willing to envision what just political institutions should look like. When describing Christian charity, Cavanaugh opposes it to political justice: "there is no priority of justice to charity here, no prior sorting out of who deserves what before benevolence can take place" (96). But in fact charity presupposes and perfects natural justice. As Pope Benedict XVI explains in his encyclicals *Deus Caritas Est* (esp. par. 26-29) and *Caritas in Veritate* (esp. par. 34-42), the agency of a just political state and mutual charity at the personal level are both necessary for the common good of society. In spite of this subtle imbalance, Cavanaugh should be commended. Showing how consumer culture is generated by our disordered desires, amounting to nothing, he also points beyond them to the fulfilling reality of embodied communion.

*John Laracy is a PhD candidate at the John Paul II Institute, who is currently writing a dissertation on Hans Urs von Balthasar's understanding of the Holy Trinity as an event of love.*

# On Minimalism: Is the “Bare Minimum” Essential Enough?

MARGARET HARPER MCCARTHY

Joshua Fields and Ryan Nicodemus Milburn, *Minimalism—Live a Meaningful Life* (Asymmetrical Press, 2011).

It is now a common feature of American life to see life-style guides, manuals and gurus offering their path to the good life. We have advice from de-cluttering, tidying up, and folding (no, rolling!) clothes (Marie Kondo), to keeping your sink in sparkling clean condition 24/7 (the “Fly Lady”), and everything in-between. There must be a need, given the market for such things. Yet one can’t help but think that this market fills the void of a wisdom that was once handed down through the generations in the families and communities to which one once belonged.

These new manuals are much like the cook-books, diet books (low fat, high fat), and foodie life-style books (free-cycling, vegetarian, vegan, no-cook, paleo, gluten free) that fill our bookshelves (and now, our toolbars) that take the place of the mothers who once taught their daughters how to cook, how to “source” ingredients, as well as how much, and when, to eat. Vacuums have to be filled, of course, but substitutes are never the same as the things they replace. One might, for example, be able to churn out any number of recipes without actually knowing how to cook, without having the *art of cooking*. As for the proliferation of diets and foodie life-styles, it is the *art of eating* that seems to have gone missing. In our pull-ourselves-up-by-the-bootstraps tradition-less manner of eating, the loss is detected in the absence (even banishment) of at least one of the essential ingredients, and one-sided exaggeration of others. What is missing above all, though, is the most essential ingredient, which is not an ingredient at all: it is the whole human context in which eating makes sense in the first place: *the common table* – where family and friends eat together. Allergies and intolerances aside, the new food fetishism has practically excluded communion at the table, since few “can” – or will – eat what they are served.

With the new life-style books, manuals, and movements, one perceives something similar. Understandably, without having learned through tradition the art of living a good life, we turn to these. Each of them can offer good ideas and advice: hide the electrical wires, make sure your bed faces the door, but doesn’t line up with it (Feng Shui), throw away seven things per day, downsize your wardrobe to the essential, if not the high-end wardrobe “capsule.” But there is a tendency for each of these to become its own mania, to the exclusion of other important dimensions of an orderly life. How, for example, is one to find time for that daily workout, if one is rolling (not folding!) all day? What is more, the underlying reason why an orderly life is to be pursued and lived in the first place is often entirely missing. It is hard not to notice the almost complete absence of children, for example, in the pages of the perfectly ordered (painted, stenciled, and furnished) homes that fill the pages of Martha Stewart’s *Living*. And here is where we come to the Minimalist movement.

At the moment, the minimalist movement is all the rage with four million followers. It is led chiefly by

Joshua Fields Millburn and Ryan Nicodemus, appropriately named “the Minimalists.” One can follow them by reading their book *Minimalism* [1] (a mere 121 pages) and/or by accessing their beautiful, black and white [website](#), also of minimal proportions. Here is the back story to what now has become their joint enterprise. Joshua and Ryan had been classmates since fifth grade, and then reconnected in their late 20s at the peak of what each had envisioned as the successful life, defined as it was by the famous “six figure income” and all the “manufactured contentment” that went with it. Finding themselves both discontented – with all the stuff, the rat race, the stress, the happiness deferred until retirement – and feeling their mortality for the first time (after the death of one of their mothers), they began to ask themselves what was genuinely worth pursuing. What would make them happy? What would give them a more meaningful life? In time they came to identify “meaning” with one of the five basic essentials: health, relationships, pursuit of passions, growth, and contribution to others. Here is where “minimalism” comes in. It is a way to privilege these five “essentials.”

Minimalism is a tool we use to live a meaningful life. There are no rules. Rather, minimalism is simply about stripping away the unnecessary things in your life so you can focus on what's important. Ultimately, minimalism is the thing that gets us past the things so we can focus on life's most important things – which actually aren't things at all. [2]

So far so good. There is much good advice about getting rid of excessive stuff, and most especially of habits that take away from time well-spent: surfing and shopping on the internet, excessive time spent in the daily commute to and from work, and so on. In many ways the minimalist movement is reminiscent of the medieval friars who disencumbered themselves of their possessions – even their cloaks – in order to strip down to the bare essentials. Who is not for getting rid of all that excess to focus on the essentials, to focus on what is important? But is minimalism's “essential” essential enough? Is its bare minimum *bare* enough?

Here is where the hipster version of dis-encumbrance parts ways with that of St. Francis. When St. Francis took leave of his father and his father's home, he did it to bind himself further to a new brotherhood, even to the places they would eventually build, for a life lived together in obedience. With minimalism, on the contrary, the “essential” is always under one's control, in view of open-ended flexibility. Examples of minimalists who own nothing but the back pack on their backs and who are in a constant state of travel, checking off items on the bucket list, or of those who live in “micro-houses” – tethered to the earth by nothing more than an electrical cord – come to mind. Essentially, minimalism's “essential” isn't bound to anything. Indeed the “inessential” things are “anchors,” which “make us feel stuck and keep us from growing,”[3] and take away the “focus on what's important.” And the list isn't limited to over-stuffed closets and attics, but to things like *work*– if it's not a “passion”– and *daily life* no less.[4] But this “anchors away” approach to stuff, and to houses, work and daily life, is only a symptom of a deeper unboundedness. Minimalism's “essential” isn't bound to *anyone*. Where, in fact, are all the mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, husbands and wives, and children? Where do *they* fit in the “micro-house,” so to speak? In fairness, they can in fact be there. But they now belong to the hipster “relationships,” which are always under one's deliberate control and subject to routine assessment, even re-negotiation when necessary. On their web-site the Minimalists say: “Allow nothing in your life that you cannot walk out on in 30 seconds flat. . . . Almost everything I bring into my life—material possessions, ideas, habits, and even relationships—I must be able to walk away from at a moment's notice.”[5]

Again, to be fair, marriage does a little better than other “relationships.” You don't leave it in “30 seconds flat.” You have to wait a little longer. Say the Minimalists: “we can ultimately walk away when these situations no longer **add value** to our lives.” (The Minimalists, by the way, are both divorced.)

Everything, then, depends on what you think the essential is, on what the bare minimum is. If we no longer belong to and are defined by the rhythm of the generations – to a particular past and a particular future, and to its places – then we have no good reason to hold onto our stuff. It would, in fact, be a virtue to get rid of it. If we do, on the other hand, the terms of our relationship to stuff changes altogether. In a wonderful article on the virtue of simplicity, written by a consummate hoarder, in a funny book entitled *The Seven Deadly Virtues*,<sup>[6]</sup> James Lileks writes about his grandmother’s hat-pin box:

I didn’t know it was from the 1893 Columbian Exposition until I took Brasso to its tarnished finish. Inside is a thin ribbon of gold, which was removed from the bridgework of my great-grandfather after his death. My daughter thinks this is TOTALLY DISGUSTING. But I put the box in her hand and say: You’re holding something from a man who fought for the Union. He lay on the battle-ground left for dead, but got up, healed, headed north, and split the sod. He is the reason we’re here. Everything can go in the cloud but that. Over this gold his breath passed, his words moved.<sup>[7]</sup>

Offering, then, the reason *why* we hold on to stuff, Lileks, continues:

Simplicity is a virtue, but it’s often misunderstood. People take it to mean that stuff doesn’t matter. We tell ourselves that it’s virtuous to divest, lest we become hoarders. The thing about hoarders, though, is that they think they’ll need their stuff someday. They have it backward. The stuff needs us to tell their stories. Just once. Before they pass along to the next set of hands. The things we save are nuggets in a sieve, and when our hand falls from the handle they tumble into the river again. But for a while you can handle the physical object and conjure its story.<sup>[8]</sup>

It is because, then, of something more essential at the heart of ourselves – and our happiness, or meaning – that the *material* dimensions of a more rooted minimalism might differ. Indeed *that* essential would require us to re-think the value of the current minimalism’s most banished ingredient: *stuff*. It would require us to give greater weight to beautiful, solid, quality stuff—things handed down, things for living now, and things to hand on—including the containers in which to put it all: linen closets, hope chests, china cabinets and attics. Enough for the members of the family and their guests. And in houses *big enough* to contain it all.

But there is something even more basic that doesn’t figure into minimalism’s “essential,” namely religion: boundedness of a vertical kind. That too is one of the many “anchors.” St. Francis, of course, dis-encumbered himself to be bound by *that* “Anchor.” But it was that same Anchor—being the God of Creation, Incarnation and Resurrection—that had him and so many brothers, sisters, monks, and nuns anchor themselves to each other, and to the beautiful, big, solid places, where they, among other things, dedicated themselves to the cultivation and production of so much good stuff! A bare minimum, yes. But a *bound* one, vertically and horizontally. And for that a more generous one.

---

[1] Joshua Fields Millburn and Ryan Nicodemus, *Minimalism – Live a Meaningful Life* (Missoula, Montana: Asymmetrical Press, 2016).

[2] *Minimalism*, 25.

[3] *Minimalism*, 17.

[4] *Minimalism*, 79.

[5] <http://www.theminimalists.com/walk-away/>

[6] *The Seven Deadly Virtues*, edited by Jonathan V. Last (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press, 2014).

[7] *The Seven Deadly Virtues*, 119.

[8] *The Seven Deadly Virtues*, 120.

