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CATHOLIC TRADITION, AND THE NEW CATHOLIC THEOLOGY AND SOCIAL TEACHING ON THE ENVIRONMENT

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The world that God created has been entrusted to us, yet our use of it must be directed by God's plan for creation, not simply by our own benefit. Our stewardship of the earth is a kind of participation in God's act of creating and sustaining the world.

U.S. Catholic Conference, *Faithful Citizenship: Civic Responsibility for a New Millennium*, issued October 19, 1999.

I. INTRODUCTION

As humanity has become more aware of the conditions that threaten the world's environment, and as communities have begun crafting solutions to environmental problems, a nascent body of Catholic theology and social teaching has emerged to address environmental concerns. This theology and teaching can only be understood in light of long-standing Catholic traditions concerning creation, redemption, and the role of humanity in these processes. These traditions show that the resources of our natural environment are important in their own right to the processes of creation and redemption of the universe. Catholic tradition also shows that humanity has a unique set of responsibilities. It is essential, for example, that we respect creation and exercise stewardship over it. Under the Church's new environmental theology and teaching, such reverence and stewardship require that human communities embrace, first, a

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moral sense of their responsibilities as stewards of creation; second, a more “authentic” approach to future development; third, the use of natural resources for the universal common good (with a particular concern for the poor); and fourth, a particular respect for human life. For Catholics in particular, this teaching also urges that respect for the environment be grounded in a “sacramental” sense of creation. Catholic authorities are now making a particular call to conversion of humanity’s relation to the environment during the Jubilee Year 2000.

Currently, there is no large body of Catholic theology and social teaching on environmental protection. One theologian observed that an environmental ethic is “a new thing” for Catholic bishops and theologians.¹ There are, however, millennia of Judeo-Christian tradition on more fundamental subjects relevant to today’s environmental challenges, including creation, redemption, and humanity’s role in these processes. During the last century, modern Catholic social teaching has also addressed other, more specific topics relevant to environmental issues. Those include authentic development, use of the world’s resources for the common good, and an option for the poor. Not long after the modern environmental movement began nearly thirty years ago, a small number of theologians began exploring applications of Catholic tradition and social teaching to address the environmental challenges facing the world.

These efforts were increased considerably after 1989, when Pope John Paul II issued the first papal statement in history devoted exclusively to environmental issues.² The Pope issued this “message” for the celebration of the World Day of Peace, which took place a few days later on January 1, 1990.³ That same month, “in an unrelated effort, thirty-two internationally

¹ See Jay McDaniel, *Christianity and the Need for New Vision*, in RELIGION AND ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS, 188–91 (Eugene C. Hargrove ed., 1986) (stating that “there is urgent need today, within and outside Christianity, for a new vision,” and that “[this] new vision will be called an ‘ecological perspective’”).

² See Pope John Paul II, *The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility*, Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace (Jan. 1, 1990); see also U. S. CATHOLIC CONFERENCE, in “AND GOD SAW THAT IT WAS GOOD”: CATHOLIC THEOLOGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT 215 (Drew Christiansen & Walter Grazer eds., 1996).

³ See Pope John Paul II, *supra* note 2, at 1.

eminent scientists, including several Nobel laureates, issued an urgent appeal to the religious community to 'preserve the environment of the world.'⁴ After these events took place, several more bishops, as well as bishops' conferences, including the United States Catholic Conference, issued statements addressing environmental issues. In the United States, at least three regional groups of Catholic bishops (one of them including some bishops from Canada) have released pastoral letters and statements addressing natural resources.⁵ On November 14, 1991, the United States Catholic Conference issued its own statement. The Conference titled its statement, *Renewing the Earth*, and subtitled it, *An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching*.⁶ This statement repeatedly encourages reflection and dialogue among religious leaders, theologians, and others on environmental issues.⁷ Soon after these developments, the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* was released.⁸ The *Catechism* contains only a few statements specifically addressing environmental concerns, but includes many more statements addressing Catholic traditions that underlie these concerns. Following these developments, the past decade has witnessed an explosion of commentary from Catholic theologians on environmental challenges facing the world community today. Most recently in the United States and Canada, a group of Catholic bishops in the Columbia River Basin released a reflection on problems facing the Columbia River watershed, in preparation for a pastoral letter.⁹ Nearly all of the statements on the environment that Catholic theologians and bishops have made during the past

⁴ U. S. CATHOLIC CONFERENCE, *supra* note 2, at 1-2.

⁵ See Catholic Bishops of Appalachia, *This Land is Home to Me* (1975); Bishops of the Heartland (the Midwestern United States), *Strangers and Guests* (1980); Catholic Bishops of the Pacific Northwest United States and Southeastern British Columbia, Canada, *The Columbia River Watershed: Realities and Possibilities* (1999) [hereinafter Bishops of the Columbia River Basin].

⁶ See U.S. CATHOLIC CONFERENCE, *RENEWING THE EARTH* (1992) [hereinafter *RENEWING THE EARTH*].

⁷ See *id.* at 3.

⁸ See U.S. CATHOLIC CONFERENCE, *CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH* (1994) [hereinafter *CATECHISM*].

⁹ See Columbia River Pastoral Letter Project, *May 7, 1999 Press Release* (visited Feb. 18, 2000) <http://www.columbiariver.org/main_pages/press.html> ("Th[is] project will culminate in the publication of a pastoral letter on the watershed . . . in Spring 2000.").

decade have used well-established Catholic tradition as their starting point. These statements have also relied on principles of modern Catholic social teaching from the past century.

It is the objective of this article to explore the most important components of this tradition and social teaching, and some of the contemporary Catholic commentary and teaching that apply these principles to environmental issues. This article is written from the perspective of a Catholic in the United States. While bishops and theologians from throughout the world have addressed today's environmental crisis, this article focuses primarily on the teachings of Pope John Paul II, the U.S. Catholic Conference, and regional groups of bishops in the United States, as well as contributions from various American theologians.¹⁰

II. CREATION, REDEMPTION, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

A. Creation and Redemption: A Singular Process

The first body of Catholic tradition relevant to today's environmental issues is the Church's tradition on the creation and redemption of the universe. Catholic tradition has long linked the processes of creation and redemption. Indeed, a number of authorities speak of the two as a singular process.¹¹ According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, "[c]reation is the foundation of 'all God's saving plans,' the 'beginning of the history of salvation . . .'"¹² The *Catechism* refers to an "eighth day" of creation, which is "the day of Christ's Resurrection."¹³ "Thus, the work of creation culminates in the greater work of redemption."¹⁴ Under this tradition, creation is recognized as an ongoing process. "Creation . . . did not spring forth complete from the hands of the Creator. The universe was created 'in a

¹⁰ The article also addresses the theology of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J., a French theologian and anthropologist, as well as the homilies on creation offered by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger during the early 1980s. Cardinal Ratzinger, then the Archbishop of Munich, is now the Prefect for the Congregation on the Doctrine of the Faith, and a member of the Curia in the Vatican.

¹¹ See, e.g., Anne M. Clifford, *Foundations for a Catholic Ecological Theology of God*, in "AND GOD SAW THAT IT WAS GOOD": CATHOLIC THEOLOGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT 19, 28 (Drew Christiansen & Walter Grazer eds., 1996).

¹² CATECHISM, *supra* note 8, § 280 (emphasis added).

¹³ *Id.* § 349.

¹⁴ *Id.*

state of journeying' . . . toward an ultimate perfection yet to be attained, to which God has destined it."¹⁵ The Easter Vigil, an event focused on the promise of salvation and resurrection on the last day, begins each year with a reading of one or both accounts of creation in *Genesis*.¹⁶ The Gospel According to John begins with a passage that redefines creation as a process that creates "all things" both "through" and "for" Christ, who is the source of redemption.¹⁷ "Only [in this passage] do we find the conclusive and normative scriptural creation account . . . John quite consciously took up here once again the first words of the Bible and read the creation account anew . . ."¹⁸ Hence, Christ is considered the "New Adam," and "[t]he resurrection is interpreted as a new creation . . ."¹⁹

B. All Things in Creation are Inherently Good

Catholic tradition also teaches that the purpose for which all things are created is to "show . . . forth and . . . communicate" the glory of God.²⁰ "The glory of God," in turn, "consists in the *realization* of this manifestation and communication of his goodness, for which the world was created."²¹ This realization will be obtainable at the end of the world, when "[t]he ultimate purpose of creation," is achieved, which "is that God 'who is the creator of all things may at last become "all in all," thus simultaneously assuring his own glory and our beatitude.' "²²

It is essential to this purpose of creation that all things created are inherently good.²³ This point is repeated throughout *Genesis*. For example, after each of the six days during which God created the world, *Genesis* states that God looked at what He had created and was pleased:²⁴ "God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good."²⁵ Other scriptural texts

¹⁵ *Id.* § 302.

¹⁶ *See id.* § 281.

¹⁷ *John* 1:1–17.

¹⁸ CARDINAL JOSEPH RATZINGER, "IN THE BEGINNING . . ." A CATHOLIC UNDERSTANDING OF THE STORY OF CREATION AND THE FALL 25–26 (1990).

¹⁹ Richard J. Clifford, *The Bible and the Environment*, in PRESERVING THE CREATION 1, 19 (Kevin W. Irwin & Edmund D. Pellegrino eds., 1994).

²⁰ CATECHISM, *supra* note 8, § 293.

²¹ *Id.* § 294 (emphasis added).

²² *Id.* (quoting *Ad gentes* 2; *1 Corinthians* 15:28).

²³ *See id.* § 299.

²⁴ *See id.* § 339.

²⁵ *Genesis* 1:31.

also speak to the inherent goodness of creation, and of its capacity to manifest the goodness of God. *Psalm 19*, for example, states: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the sky proclaims its builder's craft."²⁶ The same theme is repeated elsewhere in Catholic tradition. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* recalls occasions in which "the Church has had to defend the goodness of creation, including that of the physical world"²⁷ against, for example, manichaeism. In his *Summa Theologica*, Saint Thomas Aquinas opines on the goodness of the natural world:

For [God] brought things into being in order that his goodness might be communicated to creatures, and be represented through them. And because his goodness could not be adequately represented by one creature alone, he produced many and diverse creatures . . . Hence the universe as a whole participates in and represents divine goodness more perfectly than any single creature alone.²⁸

A statement of the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, states that "men and women can, [and] indeed . . . must, love the things of God's creation," because "it is from God that they have received them, and it is as flowing from God's hand that they look upon them and revere them."²⁹ In his message, *The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility*, Pope John Paul II recalls that Saint Francis of Assisi "invited all of creation—animals, plants[,] natural forces, even Brother Sun and Sister Moon—to give honour and praise to the Lord."³⁰ Catholic theologians have recently cited these and other texts to encourage greater recognition of the intrinsic value of nature, independent of its value for human use.³¹

²⁶ *Psalm 19:2*; see also *Sirach 42:23–25*.

²⁷ CATECHISM, *supra* note 8, § 299.

²⁸ ELIZABETH A. JOHNSON, WOMEN, EARTH, AND CREATOR SPIRIT 39 (1993) (quoting THOMAS AQUINAS, SUMMA THEOLOGICA (Fathers of the English Dominican Province trans. 1947) pt. I-I, Q.47, art. 1 [hereinafter SUMMA THEOLOGICA]).

²⁹ Australian Bishops' Committee for Justice, Development and Peace, *Christians and Their Duty Towards Nature*, reprinted in "AND GOD SAW THAT IT WAS GOOD": CATHOLIC THEOLOGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT 245, 249 (Drew Christiansen & Walter Grazer eds., 1996) (quoting VATICAN II, GAUDIUM ET SPES 37 (1965), reprinted in VATICAN COUNCIL II: THE CONCILIAR AND POST CONCILIAR DOCUMENTS 903, 936 (Austin Flannery ed., 1992)).

³⁰ Pope John Paul II, *supra* note 2, at 5.

³¹ See Daniel M. Cowdin, *Toward an Environmental Ethic*, in PRESERVING THE CREATION 112, 115 (Kevin W. Irwin & Edmund D. Pellegrino eds., 1994).

C. Panentheism: God is Present in All Things

Closely related to the tradition that all created things are good is the tradition of panentheism. While rejecting *pantheism*, Catholic tradition has long held that God dwells *within* all of creation. "Distinct . . . from pantheism which merges God and the world, panentheism holds that the universe . . . is encompassed by the Matrix of the living God in an encircling that generates freedom, self-transcendence, and the future, all in the context of the interconnected whole."³² Several passages in scripture speak to the presence of God in all things in the universe. For example, *Psalms 139* proclaims to God:

Where can I hide from your spirit?

From your presence, where can I flee?

If I ascend to the heavens, you are there;

if I lie down in Sheol, you are there too.

If I fly with the wings of dawn and alight beyond the sea,

Even there your hand will guide me, your right hand hold me fast.³³

The *Book of Wisdom* also proclaims that God's "imperishable spirit is in all things."³⁴ In *Colossians*, Saint Paul states:

He is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation. For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.³⁵

Panentheism is discussed in non-scriptural tradition as well. In both *Summa Theologica* and *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Saint Thomas Aquinas speaks of God existing in all things.³⁶ Aquinas' argument (as paraphrased by a commentator) is that "God, although the efficient cause and therefore distinct from creation, is never really distant from creatures. God is both transcendent

³² JOHNSON, *supra* note 28, at 42–43 (emphasis added).

³³ *Psalms 139*:7–10.

³⁴ *Wisdom 12*:1.

³⁵ *Colossians 1*:15–17.

³⁶ See Clifford, *supra* note 11, at 39 (citing *SUMMA THEOLOGICA*, pt. I-II, Q.8, art.1, 111–13 (stating that God exists in everything); *id.* (citing to THOMAS AQUINAS, *SUMMA CONTRA GENTILES*, ch. 2, no. 4, 31–32 (James F. Anderson trans., 1956)) (stating that creatures die good because of their participation in the divine).

over creation and immanently present in each creature."³⁷ Aquinas goes so far as to state that creatures are good "by a kind of participation" in the divine, and that in every single creature "a trace of the Trinity is recognized."³⁸

Indeed, within the tradition of panentheism, theologians have discussed God's presence in all things as Father and Creator, as an incarnate "cosmic Christ," and as the Spirit who energizes and guides the ongoing creation of the universe. The presence of the Father in creation is usually invoked in reference to nature's work on the Father's behalf in its own creation. A larger body of panentheistic theology speaks of a "cosmic Christ" incarnate in all created things. Theologians as early as Origen have postulated that "Christ is present everywhere, diffused through all the universe, coextensive with the world and penetrating the whole of creation."³⁹ Indeed, according to J.A. Lyons:

In the *De Principiis* Origen said that the world is like one body with many members, held together by the power and reason of God as though by the one soul. . . . Origen said that Christ's body is "the whole human race, perhaps even the entire universality of creation." Elsewhere he conveyed the same idea with the expression "total body of Christ."⁴⁰

Centuries later, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J., suggested that, in addition to having divine and human natures, Christ has a cosmic nature.⁴¹ Echoing Origen's terminology, Teilhard wrote, "Between the Word on the one side and the Man-Jesus on the other, a kind of 'third Christic nature' (if I may dare to say so) emerges . . . that of the total and totalizing Christ."⁴² As J.A. Lyons noted:

Teilhard wrote that, in coming to save mankind, Christ had to animate the whole universe which bears it; for mankind is not a

³⁷ Clifford, *supra* note 11, at 39.

³⁸ *Id.* Clifford notes that "Aquinas chooses his words carefully. Creatures present only traces of the Trinity because they cannot represent their Creator adequately. Through creatures, the Trinity is both manifest and hidden from us." *Id.* at 38.

³⁹ J.A. LYONS, *THE COSMIC CHRIST IN ORIGEN AND TEILHARD DE CHARDIN* 77 (1982).

⁴⁰ *Id.*

⁴¹ *See id.* at 40 ("[Teilhard] came more and more during the last twenty years of his life to distinguish the cosmic aspect of Christ from Christ's divinity and humanity.").

⁴² *Id.* at 183.

group of isolated monads but, with the universe, makes up a single totality, consolidated by life and matter. Thus[,] besides his mystical body, Christ also has a cosmic body spread throughout the universe.⁴³

Following this theme, some theologians have suggested that the cosmic Christ, like the human Christ, labors and suffers with creation while redeeming it. To support this idea, Richard J. Clifford, S.J., quotes a verse in *Genesis* stating that, because of Original Sin, “[t]he fear and dread of [the world] shall rest on every animal of the earth.”⁴⁴ Anne M. Clifford, C.S.J., finds similar meaning in *Hosea’s* statement that creation suffers because of sin: “The land mourns, and everything that dwells in it languishes: The beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and even the fish of the sea perish.”⁴⁵ In his *Letter to the Romans*, Saint Paul himself speaks of “all creation . . . groaning in labor pains,” awaiting its redemption.⁴⁶

The idea of a third, cosmic nature in Christ has been criticized by a number of theologians and Church authorities. Even some critics of this notion, however, have supported the more long-standing “theological tradition . . . which places within Christ’s *humanity*, made perfect by its union with the divinity, the exercise of his *cosmic function* of ruling all creation.”⁴⁷

Still other theologians have addressed panentheism as the presence of the Holy Spirit which energizes the process of creation. Anne Clifford finds support for this premise in a number of scriptural passages, particularly in the *Psalms*. *Psalm 104*, for example, states that with respect to God and created things,

When you hide your face, they are lost.

When you take away their breath, they perish and return to the dust from which they came.

When you send forth your breath, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth.⁴⁸

Anne M. Clifford observes that “[t]hese verses appear to presuppose that God always creates in the Spirit, and that the

⁴³ *Id.* at 38.

⁴⁴ Clifford, *supra* note 19, at 1, 8 (quoting *Genesis* 9:2).

⁴⁵ Clifford, *supra* note 11, at 29–30 (quoting *Hosea* 4:3).

⁴⁶ *Romans* 8:22–23.

⁴⁷ LYONS, *supra* note 39, at 197 (emphasis added).

⁴⁸ *Psalm* 104:29–30.

Spirit is poured out on everything that exists, preserving and renewing it.”⁴⁹ Similarly, Elizabeth Johnson has observed that it is the Spirit who “brings forth and nurtures life,” and “keeps all things connected.”⁵⁰ She continues, “[i]n the words of the Nicene Creed, the Spirit is *vivificantem*, vivifier or life-giver. This designation refers to creation not just at the beginning of time but continuously: the Spirit is the unceasing, dynamic flow of divine power that sustains the universe”⁵¹

D. Redemption is for All of Creation

Extending from the above notions that (1) redemption is the end product of creation, and (2) God is present in all things, is a body of tradition which holds that “[t]he redemptive activity of God through Jesus Christ . . . is not only for humans but is ultimately for all of creation.”⁵² This tradition is also grounded in scripture. At the end of the story of the flood in *Genesis*, God establishes a covenant not only with Noah and his descendants, but also with “all living beings.”⁵³ God sets a bow in the clouds as a “sign of the covenant between [Himself] and the earth.”⁵⁴ This theme is echoed in the *Hosea*: “I will make a covenant for them on that day, with the beasts of the field, with the birds of the air, and with the things that crawl o[n] the ground.”⁵⁵ Prophesizing the redemption of the world in Christ, the prophet Isaiah invokes images in nature:

Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; the calf and the young lion shall browse together, with a little child to guide them. The cow and the bear shall be neighbors, together their young shall rest⁵⁶

Isaiah also proclaims:

The desert and the parched land will exult; the steppe will rejoice and bloom. They will bloom with abundant flowers, . . . Streams will burst forth in the desert, and rivers in the steppe.

⁴⁹ Clifford, *supra* note 11, at 31.

⁵⁰ JOHNSON, *supra* note 28, at 20.

⁵¹ *Id.* at 42.

⁵² Clifford, *supra* note 11, at 22.

⁵³ *Genesis* 9:16.

⁵⁴ *Id.* at 9:13.

⁵⁵ *Hosea* 2:20.

⁵⁶ *Isaiah* 11: 6–7.

The burning sands will become pools, and the thirsty ground, springs of water⁵⁷

Saint Paul's epistles also speak of the redemption that all created things will obtain through the fulfillment of this covenant through Christ. In *Romans*, Paul speaks of "creation itself [being] set free from slavery to corruption and shar[ing] in the glorious freedom of the children of God."⁵⁸ In *Colossians*, Paul speaks of God's desire "to reconcile all things for him . . . whether those on earth or those in heaven."⁵⁹ Other sources and expressions of the Catholic tradition also speak to a redemption for creation itself. For example, the *Exsultet*, read at the beginning of the Easter Vigil each year, addresses itself broadly to all things: " 'Exalt, all creation. . . . Rejoice, O earth, in shining splendor. . . . Christ has conquered [the forces of death].' "⁶⁰ For some theologians, a broader, "cosmic" view of redemption "locate[s] the human drama within [a bigger] story—from the Christian perspective, the story of redemption—of the universe as a whole."⁶¹ In the article entitled *Ecology and Eschatology*, John F. Haught remarks:

Perhaps God's primary concern is that of creating and saving an entire complex *universe*? If so, we should rejoice that we are privileged to be a small part of a much grander and indefinitely wider-than-human story of God's creating and continually renewing the immense cosmos to which we are privileged to belong.⁶²

The hope of redemption for all things entails a "hope for the new creation of *this* world, [and] not the expectation of a total substitute for the one we live in now."⁶³ As Haught observes:

[C]omplete discontinuity between "this present age" and "the age to come" would hardly be consistent with the good news of the coming of God's reign. It would amount to a denial of the inherent goodness of creation and of God's incarnation in our

⁵⁷ *Isaiah* 35:1–2, 6–7.

⁵⁸ *Romans* 8: 21.

⁵⁹ *Colossians* 1:20.

⁶⁰ Clifford, *supra* note 11, at 19.

⁶¹ David Toolan, S.J., *The Voice of the Hurricane: Cosmology and a Catholic Theology of Nature*, in "AND GOD SAW THAT IT WAS GOOD": CATHOLIC THEOLOGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT 65, 69 (Drew Christiansen & Walter Grazer eds., 1996).

⁶² John H. Haught, *Ecology and Eschatology*, in "AND GOD SAW THAT IT WAS GOOD": CATHOLIC THEOLOGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT 47, 62 (Drew Christiansen & Walter Grazer eds., 1996).

⁶³ *Id.* at 54.

present world. . . . God's reign transforms or transfigures but does not abandon or obliterate the natural world.⁶⁴

Most recently, the Bishops of the Columbia River Basin note in their 1999 reflection: "The Lord's Prayer expresses the hope that God's reign will be established: 'your kingdom come.' The reign of God will transform Earth at the end of time as we know it. Then the world will experience God's will done 'on Earth as it is in heaven.'" ⁶⁵

Theologians have also considered the concept of redemption for the universe in light of the tradition that redemption will entail a unification of the Body of Christ. Perhaps no theologian has pursued this idea further than Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J. "Teilhard saw the evolutionary movement of the universe as directed towards the building up of Christ. The completed Christ is the goal of the universe Teilhard introduced the term 'Christ-Omega' to designate Christ as this goal."⁶⁶ He also

⁶⁴ *Id.*

⁶⁵ Bishops of the Columbia River Basin, *supra* note 5, at 32. Their reflection later observes that this "vision of a new Earth is described in [chapter 22 of] Revelation . . . the last book of the . . . bible. There, John the visionary relates that he saw living waters flowing through and nurturing a tree of life—bringing the Eden story full circle—which provides fruit for food and leaves for medicine for all peoples." *Id.*

⁶⁶ LYONS, *supra* note 39, at 38. As part of his conception of the ongoing creation, evolution, and redemption of the universe, Teilhard expressed a particular view of original sin and the Fall, which are relevant to a theological consideration of today's environmental problems. Teilhard speculated that original sin, in its widest sense, is not "bound up with [the] human generation," or even "a malady specific to the earth." PIERRE TEILHARD DE CHARDIN, CHRISTIANITY AND EVOLUTION 36, 40 (Rene Hague trans., 1969). Rather, Teilhard's theology "spread[] the Fall throughout the whole of universal history." *Id.* at 54. He regarded original sin as "the reverse side of all creation." *Id.* at 40. He reasoned that "[b]y the very fact that he creates, God commits himself to a fight against evil . . . effecting a redemption." *Id.* He explained, "[a]ll creation brings with it, as its accompanying risk and shadow, some fault; in other words, it has its counterpart in some redemption." *Id.* at 51–52. The "tendency towards inaction and selfishness found in creatures . . . [and] concomitant of their effort to progress" in evolution is original sin. *Id.* at 40. As a necessary corollary to this conception of original sin, Teilhard speculated that "[t]he earthly paradise [Eden] never [actually] existed, since it represents above all a promise." *Id.* at 54. Teilhard's conception of original sin finds some support in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. See CATECHISM, *supra* note 8. In its discussion on original sin, the *Catechism* explains that God could have created a complete world, "so perfect that no evil could exist in it." *Id.* § 310. However, "God freely willed to create a world 'in a state of journeying' towards its ultimate perfection. In God's plan, this process of becoming involves . . . the existence of . . . both constructive and destructive forces of nature. With physical good there exists also *physical evil* [distinct from '*moral evil*'] as long as creation has not reached perfection." *Id.* (emphasis added).

used the terms “cosmogogenesis” and “Christogenesis” to characterize the universe’s evolution toward that goal.⁶⁷ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger has also explained that “the body of history . . . will ultimately become the body of Christ.”⁶⁸ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains the latter tradition with a reference to Saint Paul’s *First Letter to the Corinthians*: “The ultimate purpose of creation is that God ‘who is the creator of all things may at last become ‘all in all’ . . .’ ”⁶⁹ The *Catechism* also states that creation is “the ‘beginning of the history of salvation’ that culminates in Christ.”⁷⁰

The importance of Catholic tradition on creation and redemption to today’s environmental issues hardly needs to be stated. As summarized above, this tradition holds that (1) creation is a continuing process and is essential to the redemption of the universe; (2) all of creation is inherently good in its own right and is intended to communicate the glory of God; (3) God is present in all things; and (4) God’s plan is that all of creation—and not only human beings—be redeemed and reconciled to God. It is a necessary response to this tradition that individuals and communities respect all of creation and abstain from interfering with its processes.

III. HUMANITY’S RELATION TO THE ENVIRONMENT

A second body of Catholic tradition relevant to environmental protection addresses humanity’s relation to the environment within the creative and redemptive processes discussed above. Catholic tradition holds that as a part of creation, men and women are intimately linked with their environment. Human beings, however, are distinct from the rest of creation as the only beings created in the image and likeness of God. As such, human beings are given the dual responsibilities of serving as stewards over their environment,

⁶⁷ LYONS, *supra* note 39, at 39. Teilhard borrowed the term “omega” from *Revelation*, where Christ is referred to as the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. See *Revelation* 22:13. Teilhard’s conception of evolution is also built on Origen’s idea of the universe’s progression. Origen wrote that Christ “provides an end for the things created from him,” and that “he is the Omega at the consummation of the ages.” LYONS, *supra* note 39, at 130.

⁶⁸ RATZINGER, *supra* note 18, at 48.

⁶⁹ CATECHISM, *supra* note 8, § 294.

⁷⁰ *Id.* § 280.

and as agents acting on God's behalf in the ongoing process of creation and redemption.

A. Humanity is a Part of Creation, Linked to its Environment

The most basic principle of humanity's relationship to the environment is that humanity is part of creation. Indeed, we are part of the environment in which we live. In the first creation account in *Genesis*, God creates mankind and other animals on the same day.⁷¹ In the second creation account, God "form[s] Man out of the clay of the ground."⁷² "In the book of *Genesis* the Hebrew word for 'Earth' is *adamah*, while the Hebrew word for 'human' is *adam*. So we humans are Earth-creatures."⁷³ "From an ecological standpoint . . . since humans share the same day of creation with animals, a kinship exists between humankind and [nature]. There is a fundamental connectedness between humans and the rest of creation."⁷⁴ Theologian Arthur Peacocke invokes a vivid image of this connection: "Every atom of iron in our blood would not have been there had it not been produced in some galactic explosion billions of years ago and eventually condensed to form the iron in the crust of the earth from which we have emerged."⁷⁵ David Toolan, S.J., similarly observes that the DNA molecules in our cells store "information garnered over some four billion years of evolution" of various creatures.⁷⁶ Teilhard de Chardin may have most eloquently expressed this bond when he observed that "[t]he human person is the sum total of fifteen billion years of unbroken evolution now thinking about itself."⁷⁷

In recent years, Church authorities have encouraged a greater awareness of humanity's bond with the rest of creation. In his statement, *The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility*, Pope John Paul II observes that "Adam and Eve's

⁷¹ See *Genesis* 1:26-27; see also Clifford, *supra* note 11, at 26.

⁷² *Genesis* 2:7.

⁷³ Catholic Bishops of Appalachia, *At Home in the Web of Life* 28 (1995) [hereinafter *At Home in the Web of Life*]

⁷⁴ Clifford, *supra* note 11, at 26.

⁷⁵ Arthur R. Peacocke, *Theology and Science Today, in COSMOS AS CREATION* 28, 32 (Ted Peters ed., 1989).

⁷⁶ Toolan, *supra* note 61, at 65, 97.

⁷⁷ JOHNSON, *supra* note 28, at 37 (quoting PIERRE TEILHARD DE CHARDIN, *THE DIVINE MILIEU* (1960)). Similarly, the Bishops of the Columbia River Basin have remarked that "humans are called to be the loving and integrating consciousness of the cosmos." Bishops of the Columbia River Basin, *supra* note 5, at 23.

call to share in the unfolding of God's plan of creation . . . established a fixed relationship between mankind and the rest of creation."⁷⁸ He invokes the example of Saint Francis of Assisi to encourage "a sense of 'fraternity' " with the rest of creation.⁷⁹ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* also speaks of a "solidarity among all creatures arising from the fact that all have the same Creator and are all ordered to his glory."⁸⁰

B. Human Beings are Dependent on the Rest of Creation, and Must Remain at Peace with Creation

An important component of humanity's connection with creation is its dependence on the environment. The *Catechism* recognizes that "[c]reatures exist only in dependence on each other, to complete each other, in service of each other."⁸¹ Our dependence on nature extends beyond physical dependence. In its statement, *Renewing the Earth*, the U.S. Catholic Conference observes that "[i]n elaborating a natural moral law, [people] look to natural processes themselves for norms for human behavior."⁸² Jesus himself encouraged his followers to learn from observations of "the birds in the sky," and "the way the wild flowers grow."⁸³ Passages in *Genesis* and *Exodus* also suggest that God intends that humanity pattern its own behavior after the process of creation:

The words "God said" appear ten times in the [first] creation account. In this way the creation narrative anticipates the Ten Commandments. This makes us realize that these Ten Commandments are, as it were, an echo of the creation . . . [T]hey are a translation of the language of the universe, a translation of God's logic, which constructed the universe. The number that governs the whole is seven; in the scheme of seven days it permeates the whole in a way that cannot be overlooked . . . It becomes clear that we human beings are . . . part of the rhythm of the universe . . .⁸⁴

Because of the bond that humanity shares with its natural environment, Catholic tradition has held that for there to be

⁷⁸ Pope John Paul II, *supra* note 2, at 1.

⁷⁹ *Id.* at 5.

⁸⁰ CATECHISM, *supra* note 8, § 344 (emphasis omitted).

⁸¹ *Id.* § 340.

⁸² RENEWING THE EARTH, *supra* note 6, at 2.

⁸³ *Matthew* 6:26, 28.

⁸⁴ RATZINGER, *supra* note 18, at 39–40.

peaceful relations among people, it is imperative that humanity be at peace with the rest of creation. Pope John Paul II has stated that "peace with all creation . . . is inseparable from peace among all peoples."⁸⁵ This tie between interpersonal relations and humanity's relation to nature is also expressed in the *Catechism*, which states that "[i]t is contrary to *human* dignity to cause *animals* to suffer or die needlessly."⁸⁶ The U.S. Catholic Conference has expanded on this theme:

The web of life is one. Our mistreatment of the natural world diminishes our own dignity and sacredness Our tradition calls us to protect the life and dignity of the human person, and it is increasingly clear that this task cannot be separated from the care and defense of creation.⁸⁷

C. Humanity: "Summit of the Creator's Work"

Some ecologists and theologians have criticized the notion that humanity is more important than the rest of creation, or that humanity, more than other components of nature, will be the focal point of redemption. These critics condemn the "anthropocentrism" of more traditional views of redemption and humanity's relation to the environment. One theologian condemned the "[h]ierarchical dualism" extending from this belief, under which "humanity is detached from and more important than nature."⁸⁸ Others have criticized the idea of humanity's stewardship over nature as an "unecological" approach that is not sufficiently egalitarian in its distribution of power, value, and control among the components of nature.⁸⁹ These critics reflect a school of environmental thought that has been called both "radical antihumanism"⁹⁰ and "radical biocentrism."⁹¹ The school "radically subsumes humanity [into]

⁸⁵ Pope John Paul II, *supra* note 2, at 5.

⁸⁶ CATECHISM, *supra* note 8, § 2418 (emphasis added).

⁸⁷ RENEWING THE EARTH, *supra* note 6, at 2; *see also* At Home in the Web of Life, *supra* note 73, at 36 ("Human dignity and community are linked with the wonder dignity and community of nature in a single web of life. We may describe this reality as . . . the natural order of creation.").

⁸⁸ JOHNSON, *supra* note 28, at 10.

⁸⁹ *See, e.g.*, Gabriel Daly, *Foundations in Systematics for Ecological Theology*, in PRESERVING THE CREATION 33, 42 (Kevin W. Irwin & Edmund D. Pellegrino eds., 1994).

⁹⁰ *See id.*

⁹¹ *See* Cowdin, *supra* note 31, at 138.

the larger . . . system."⁹² "For radical biocentrists, the good of the biotic community becomes the ultimate basis on which to judge right and wrong, with humans given no special consideration."⁹³ "Radical antihumanism" or "radical biocentrism" is inconsistent with Catholic tradition.

According to Catholic tradition, human beings *do* occupy a special, higher status among created things. The first account of creation in *Genesis* sets humans apart from the rest of creation as the only beings created in the "image" and "likeness" of God.⁹⁴ The second account sets humans apart as the only beings into whom God blew "the breath of life,"⁹⁵ giving them souls. The concept of the " 'soul' . . . refers to the innermost aspect of man, that which is of the greatest value in him, that by which he is most especially in God's image. . . ."⁹⁶ The soul "signifies the *spiritual principle* in man."⁹⁷ "Being in the image of God the human individual possesses the *dignity* of a person, who is not just something, but someone."⁹⁸ The unique dignity given to humanity makes it "*the summit* of the Creator's work."⁹⁹

Of all visible creatures only man is "able to know and love his creator." He is "the only creature on earth that God has willed for its own sake," and he alone is called to share, by knowledge and love, in God's own life. It was for this end that he was created, and this is the fundamental reason for his dignity . . .¹⁰⁰

Christ reaffirmed the unique status of humanity within creation by coming into the world as a human being.¹⁰¹

⁹² *Id.*

⁹³ *Id.*

⁹⁴ *Genesis* 1:26–27.

⁹⁵ *Id.* at 2:7.

⁹⁶ CATECHISM, *supra* note 8, § 363.

⁹⁷ *Id.*

⁹⁸ *Id.* § 357.

⁹⁹ *Id.* § 343.

¹⁰⁰ *Id.* § 356 (internal citations omitted).

¹⁰¹ See RATZINGER, *supra* note 18, at 59 ("In him God enters into his creation."); see also TEILHARD DE CHARDIN, *supra* note 66, at 59 ("The new Adam was made man, rather than anything else, for a reason intrinsic to mankind."). Even the theology of a "cosmic Christ" acknowledges a special status and role for humanity in unifying the Body of Christ in creation. Teilhard de Chardin explains:

[T]he universe can and must be conceived as converging towards a point of supreme confluence. In virtue, moreover, of its universal and increasing unification, it possesses this property, that each of its elements is organically connected with all the others. In these circumstances, there is

D. Humanity: "Co-Creators" Under God and Stewards of the Created Universe

The reason that God gave human beings "abilities and gifts which distinguish [them] from all other creatures," is that God has called humanity "to share in the unfolding of God's plan of creation. . . ." ¹⁰² As part of God's covenant with all of creation, He has made a particular covenant with humanity. Humanity "is called by grace to a covenant with his Creator, to offer him a response of faith and love *that no other creature can give* in his stead."¹⁰³ Under this covenant, human beings are called to "become 'God's fellow workers' and co-workers for his kingdom."¹⁰⁴ This is to be a "collaboration of man and woman with God in perfecting the visible creation."¹⁰⁵ The U.S. Catholic Conference has gone so far as to state that God calls us to act as "co-creators" of a new world.¹⁰⁶ This idea finds support in scripture. In his *First Letter to the Corinthians*, Saint Paul analogizes human beings to builders who share in God's work of constructing His kingdom.¹⁰⁷ God remains "the sovereign master of his plan" of creation.¹⁰⁸ However, in carrying this plan out, God acts as a "first cause who operates in and through secondary causes"—that is, through humanity.¹⁰⁹

Part of humanity's responsibility under this covenant is a stewardship over the rest of creation. In the first creation account in *Genesis*, after creating humans, God says, "[l]et them have dominion over the fish and the sea, the birds of the air, and the cattle, and the wild animals and all creatures that crawl on the ground."¹¹⁰ God then "blessed them, saying to them, 'Be fertile and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it.' "¹¹¹ In the

nothing to prevent a human individual nature from having been so chosen, and its omnifluence having been so elevated, that from being [one among equals] it has become [first above all].

Id. at 41 (citations omitted).

¹⁰² Pope John Paul II, *supra* note 2, at 1.

¹⁰³ CATECHISM, *supra* note 8, § 357 (emphasis added).

¹⁰⁴ *Id.* § 307.

¹⁰⁵ *Id.* § 378.

¹⁰⁶ *Renewing the Earth*, *supra* note 6, at 12; *see also* Bishops of the Heartland, *supra* note 5, at 14.

¹⁰⁷ 1 *Corinthians* 3:9–15.

¹⁰⁸ CATECHISM, *supra* note 8, § 306.

¹⁰⁹ *Id.* § 308.

¹¹⁰ *Genesis* 1:26.

¹¹¹ *Id.* at 1:28.

second creation account of *Genesis*, God places Adam in the garden “to cultivate and care for it.”¹¹² God further instructs Adam to “name” the beasts of the earth, “connot[ing] appropriate authority, affinity, and care” for them.¹¹³ It follows that “[m]en and women . . . bear a unique responsibility under God: to safeguard the created world and by their creative labor even to enhance it.”¹¹⁴

Some Christians have interpreted the scriptural directive that humanity “ha[s] dominion over” the earth, and the word “subdue,” to justify exploitation of the environment.¹¹⁵ More recently, theologians have offered contrary interpretations of the same language, requiring a stewardship that precludes exploitation. For example, Richard Clifford argues that the full meaning of the word “dominion” in Chapter 1 of *Genesis* only becomes evident in Chapter 9, where God establishes the covenant with Noah.¹¹⁶ According to Anne Clifford, “God’s directive [to Noah] makes the meaning of having dominion clear—it is to see to the survival of the other living creatures.”¹¹⁷ Indeed, “Noah brought two individuals (male and female) of every kind of animal into the ark, to keep them alive with him ([*Genesis*] 6:19). God’s command . . . evidently implied that the human race was to keep other forms of animal life in existence, to save them from destruction.”¹¹⁸ Anne Clifford, referring to Richard Clifford, notes that “examination of [the word] ‘subdue’ in other biblical texts, for example in *Numbers* 32:21–22, has led [Richard Clifford] to conclude that [the word] subdue means to inhabit the land that God has given as a gift, transforming it into a home where God can be worshiped.”¹¹⁹

Bishops in the United States have repeatedly emphasized in statements on the environment that stewardship does not give humanity absolute ownership of the earth and its resources;

¹¹² *Id.* at 2:15.

¹¹³ Clifford, *supra* note 19, at 8.

¹¹⁴ RENEWING THE EARTH, *supra* note 6, at 4.

¹¹⁵ Daly, *supra* note 89, at 41.

¹¹⁶ Richard J. Clifford, *Genesis 1–3: Permission to Exploit Nature?*, in 26 THE BIBLE TODAY 133, 135 (1988).

¹¹⁷ Clifford, *supra* note 11, at 27.

¹¹⁸ Clifford, *supra* note 19, at 6.

¹¹⁹ *Id.* at 27 (citing Clifford, *supra* note 116, at 133, 136).

these belong to God.¹²⁰ Quoting from *Leviticus*, the Bishops of the Heartland explain:

When the Jewish people finally arrived at their new homeland, and apportioned the land among themselves, God described for them what their attitude should be toward the land as property: "Land must not be sold in perpetuity, for the land belongs to me And to me you are only strangers and guests."¹²¹

Catholic social teaching does defend individuals' rights to private property, while recognizing that "[n]o one truly owns any part of creation" in an absolute sense.¹²² "We may be assigned to care for parts of [creation], but only if we serve the needs of others, along with our own needs."¹²³ In their statement *Strangers and Guests*, the Bishops of the Heartland further explain, with respect to environmental stewardship, the relationship in Catholic social teaching between private property rights and communal responsibility:

Stewardship means caring for God's creation. It implies that civil title to a portion of the earth does not confer absolute ownership of it. That belongs to God alone. Civil title does confer responsibility for the land: for the use to which it is put and the care with which it is treated.

Stewardship, therefore, is expressed in two fundamental ways: *custody* of the land according to the civil laws governing property relationships in a particular place at a particular time, but subordinate to God's laws and the purpose for which God created the land; and *conservation* of the land to the best of current knowledge so that God's creation might benefit present and future generations of humanity.

....

Private property is good because of the benefits it confers on the many, not because of the advantages it gives to the few. The Church's teaching succinctly stated is: Private ownership with community of use.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ See *Psalm* 89:12 (proclaiming to God: "Yours are the heavens and yours is the earth . . .").

¹²¹ Bishops of the Heartland, *supra* note 5, at 19–20 (quoting *Leviticus* 25:23); see also *At Home in the Web of Life*, *supra* note 73, at 35 (citing same passage).

¹²² *At Home in the Web of Life*, *supra* note 73, at 35.

¹²³ *Id.*

¹²⁴ Bishops of the Heartland, *supra* note 5, at 14–15.

IV. THE "ECOLOGICAL CRISIS" OF TODAY

Pope John Paul II has labeled the totality of the environmental challenges facing humanity today "The Ecological Crisis."¹²⁵ This crisis is due, in part, to humanity's past and present failures to be adequate stewards of the environment. It is also due to the new level of power over the environment which technology and increased population has allowed humankind to attain during this century. Any attempt to summarize the range of environmental challenges facing us today would be inadequate. A few of these challenges include the large number of hazardous waste sites; the use of hazardous substances as pesticides; discharges of pollution into lakes, streams, and oceans; discharges of pollution into the air; the "greenhouse effect" and global warming; depletion of forests, wetlands, and other natural landscapes; depletion of ocean coral reefs; and the loss of endangered species and other biota. Given the present scope of these problems, in addition to expected increases in population and development, it may not be an exaggeration to say that "the survival of God's earthly creation is at risk."¹²⁶

Catholic bishops and theologians now regard environmental degradation as a significant consequence of sin—the "moral evil"¹²⁷ of the Fall—working against the fulfillment of God's creative plan. The *Catechism* notes that God has given humanity free will with respect to our stewardship of the rest of creation: "To human beings God even gives the power of freely sharing in his providence by entrusting them with the responsibility of 'subduing' the earth and having dominion over it. God thus enables men to be intelligent and free causes in order to complete the work of creation . . ."¹²⁸ However, free will also gives humanity "the possibility of refusal," and, with respect to our duties of stewardship, "[this] possibility has . . . become an actuality."¹²⁹ By knowingly abusing the resources of our environment, "[a]s a species we have, on a significant scale, refused to cooperate with the creator."¹³⁰ Because of humanity's doubt in their covenant with God and its "refus[al] to accept the

¹²⁵ See John Paul II, *supra* note 2.

¹²⁶ Clifford, *supra* note 11, at 20.

¹²⁷ CATECHISM, *supra* note 8, § 311.

¹²⁸ *Id.* § 307.

¹²⁹ Daly, *supra* note 89, at 51.

¹³⁰ *Id.*

standard and the limitations that are implicit in it," its "relationship to the world is altered in such a way as to become one of destruction and exploitation."¹³¹

Humanity's "new sins against God's gracious will: biocide, ecocide, geocide" have caused physical harm to the environment.

¹³² Pope John Paul II explains:

When man turns his back on the Creator's plan, he provokes a disorder which has inevitable repercussions on the rest of the created order. If man is not at peace with God, then earth itself cannot be at peace: "Therefore the land mourns and all who dwell in it languish, and also the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and even the fish of the sea are taken away."¹³³

In turn, humanity itself has suffered because of the damage it has done to the environment. According to Pope John Paul II:

Adam and Eve were to have exercised their dominion over the earth with wisdom and love. Instead, they destroyed the existing harmony *by deliberately going against the Creator's plan*, that is, by choosing to sin. This resulted not only in man's alienation from himself . . . but also in *the earth's "rebellion" against him*.¹³⁴

Catholic bishops in the United States have commented at length on the interrelatedness of environmental degradation and human suffering.¹³⁵ For example, the Bishops of the Heartland observe in their statement: "The land is living and helps provide life for all creatures. When it is abused, the land and all creatures dependent on it suffer. Abuse of the land is therefore abuse of people, abuse of God's creation and abuse of the responsibility of stewardship."¹³⁶ Alluding to Pope John Paul II's encyclical, *The Gospel of Life*, the Catholic Bishops of Appalachia

¹³¹ RATZINGER, *supra* note 18, at 87–88.

¹³² JOHNSON, *supra* note 28, at 65.

¹³³ Pope John Paul II, *supra* note 2, at 2 (quoting *Hosea* 4:3).

¹³⁴ *Id.* at 1 (second emphasis added) (internal citations omitted); *see also* At Home in the Web of Life, *supra* note 73, at 29 ("[T]he deep root of the ecological crisis, that is, the wounding of the Earth, can be found in human sin . . . [W]hat is the destruction of the Earth but . . . rejection of the . . . God of love?"); Bishops of the Columbia River Basin, *supra* note 5, at 2 ("These evils are expressed in *individual sin* when particular persons express these evils; *communal sin* when a community is permeated by them; and *structural sin* when social systems and institutions—political, economic, educational or religious—embody them.").

¹³⁵ *See, e.g.*, Bishops of the Columbia River Basin, *supra* note 5, at 2; BISHOPS OF THE HEARTLAND, *supra* note 5, at 6.

¹³⁶ BISHOPS OF THE HEARTLAND, *supra* note 5, at 17.

have criticized the “culture of death” for “frequently treating [both] people and the rest of nature as if they were useless waste from a throw-away consumer society.”¹³⁷

A few Catholic authorities and theologians have observed that during the Twentieth Century, humankind reached a new threshold with respect to its relationship to the environment. Today, more than ever before, human beings are able to impact the rest of creation, for better or worse, on a global scale. As more than one theologian has noted, this was the first century during which human beings were able to observe the whole planet at once, from space. Humanity can now impact the environment on a global scale, thereby reaching a new dimension in our “dominion” of the earth. Cardinal Ratzinger observes: “Previously[,] human beings could only transform particular things in nature; nature as such was not the object but rather the presupposition of their activity. Now, however, it itself has been delivered over to them *in toto*. Yet as a result they suddenly see themselves imperiled as never before.”¹³⁸ Daniel M. Cowdin believes that this sense of peril is due to our witnessing a “genuinely new and decisive moment in world history” in which, in addition to our dependence on nature, nature is truly dependent on us.¹³⁹ The U.S. Catholic Conference has also recognized that “humanity is [now] at a crossroads,” and warns that “[t]he task set before us is unprecedented, intricate, [and] complex.”¹⁴⁰

V. A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

During the past decade, Catholic bishops and theologians have had much to say about how members of the Church (and, indeed, all people) should apply Catholic tradition to approach today’s environmental problems. Catholic authorities have offered limited suggestions for changes in specific national and international policies on the environment. For example, Pope John Paul II has called for the United Nations’ Charter of Human Rights to be updated to include a right to a safe environment.¹⁴¹ More often, bishops and theologians have

¹³⁷ At Home in the Web of Life, *supra* note 73, at 7.

¹³⁸ RATZINGER, *supra* note 18, at 51.

¹³⁹ Cowdin, *supra* note 31, at 115.

¹⁴⁰ RENEWING THE EARTH, *supra* note 6, at 12.

¹⁴¹ See Pope John Paul II, *supra* note 2, at 3. In the United States, statements

identified environmental issues that policy makers should explore. Most significantly, addressing themselves to individuals, states, and other human institutions, Catholic authorities have identified and expanded on a few principles through which they believe Catholic tradition and social teaching should be applied to address today's environmental problems.

A. Defining Environmental Concerns as Issues of Faith and Morality

First, and perhaps most importantly, Church authorities have identified environmental concerns as issues of faith and morality that must be taken seriously. As discussed above, Catholic tradition has long recognized humanity's stewardship of creation and the responsibilities that stewardship entails. The *Catechism* plainly states that people must "respect the particular goodness of every creature," and "avoid any disordered use of things which would be in contempt of the Creator and would bring disastrous consequences for human beings and their environment."¹⁴² In *The Ecological Crisis*, Pope John Paul II brings a new emphasis to this responsibility in repeated statements that environmental issues present a *moral imperative*. In the statement's introduction, the Pope states that solutions to environmental issues must be "based on a morally coherent world view."¹⁴³ He later identifies destruction of the environment as an aspect of a "profound moral crisis,"¹⁴⁴ and, in the statement's conclusion, emphasizes "that *the ecological crisis*

of regional bishops' groups have offered a greater number of specific policy suggestions than the Pope or the U.S. Catholic Conference have offered. For example, the following is part of the 1980 statement of the Bishops of the Heartland, *Strangers and Guests*:

We urge strict enforcement of the Federal Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977, and the passage by the States of our region of severance tax laws and laws prohibiting mining of prime agricultural land and of land on which rural communities are located. We propose that some of the income derived from severance taxes be used for conservation of existing land and water resources, and for restoration of the productive capacities and ecological balances of exploited areas.

BISHOPS OF THE HEARTLAND, *supra* note 5, at 23.

¹⁴² CATECHISM, *supra* note 8, §339.

¹⁴³ Pope John Paul II, *supra* note 2, at 1.

¹⁴⁴ *Id.* at 2.

is a moral issue.”¹⁴⁵ The Pope adds that Christians’ “responsibility within creation and their duty towards nature and the Creator are an essential part of their faith.”¹⁴⁶ In *Renewing the Earth*, the U.S. Catholic Conference reiterates this point: “It is to the Creator of the universe . . . that we are accountable for what we do or fail to do to preserve and care for the earth and all its creatures.”¹⁴⁷ The Conference adds that environmental issues “constitute an exceptional call to conversion.”¹⁴⁸ The Conference also encourages reflection and dialogue about environmental problems, moral issues associated with them, and the best means of addressing them.¹⁴⁹

B. Authentic Development

Catholic authorities have also called on humanity to engage in “authentic development” that is consistent with protection of the environment. Authentic development is a concept in Catholic social teaching that discourages “accept[ing] material growth as a model of development.”¹⁵⁰ Human development is “authentic” only if it is consistent with God’s plan for creation and redemption of the world. Authentic development is an alternative to “the false worship of progress, the worship of changes that crush humankind, and the calumny against the human species that destroys the earth and creation and keeps it from its goal.”¹⁵¹ Pope John Paul II repeatedly emphasizes the importance of authentic development in *The Ecological Crisis*. For example, he criticizes the “indiscriminate application” of technological advances in agriculture and industry.¹⁵² His statement also urges modern society to “take[] a serious look at its life style.”¹⁵³ The Pope remarks:

In many parts of the world society is given to instant gratification and consumerism while remaining indifferent to the damage which these cause Simplicity, moderation and discipline, as well as a spirit of sacrifice, must become part of

¹⁴⁵ *Id.* at 5.

¹⁴⁶ *Id.*

¹⁴⁷ RENEWING THE EARTH, *supra* note 6, at 6.

¹⁴⁸ *Id.* at 3.

¹⁴⁹ *See id.* at 1, 3, 13.

¹⁵⁰ *Id.* at 8.

¹⁵¹ RATZINGER, *supra* note 18, at 53.

¹⁵² Pope John Paul II, *supra* note 2, at 2.

¹⁵³ *Id.* at 4.

everyday life, lest all suffer the negative consequences of the careless habits of a few.¹⁵⁴

The U.S. Catholic Conference has likewise called for “moderation and even austerity in the use of material resources,” as well as “alternative visions of the good society” in the interest of preventing environmental degradation.¹⁵⁵ More specifically, the Conference has urged “the proper use of both agricultural and industrial technologies, so that development does not merely mean technological advancement for its own sake but rather that technology benefits people and enhances the land.”¹⁵⁶

In more recent statements, regional groups of American bishops have called for “sustainable development.”¹⁵⁷ Such development would “put back into the social and ecological community as much as it takes out, so that . . . communities will be sustainable for future generations.”¹⁵⁸ For example, the Appalachian bishops encourage the use of agricultural techniques that sustain soil and do not harm people, as well as forestry techniques that selectively harvest timber to maintain forest resources and biodiversity.¹⁵⁹

During his 1979 visit to Des Moines, Iowa, Pope John Paul II emphasized to Americans in particular the importance of maintaining sustainable natural resources: “You are stewards to some of the most important resources God has given the world. Therefore conserve the land well, so that your children’s children and generations after them will inherit an even richer land than was entrusted to you.”¹⁶⁰

C. Environmental Justice and the Common Good

A theme related to authentic development that resonates even more strongly in recent Catholic statements on the environment is that of “environmental justice” and the common good. Used in both secular and religious contexts, the term “environmental justice” denotes the broad range of problems

¹⁵⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵⁵ RENEWING THE EARTH, *supra* note 6, at 9.

¹⁵⁶ *Id.* at 9.

¹⁵⁷ At Home in the Web of Life, *supra* note 73, at 42; Bishops of the Columbia River Basin, *supra* note 5, at 25.

¹⁵⁸ At Home in the Web of Life, *supra* note 73, at 37.

¹⁵⁹ *See id.* at 45–46.

¹⁶⁰ Pope John Paul II, Homily at Living History Farms (October 4, 1979), *quoted in* BISHOPS OF THE HEARTLAND, *supra* note 5, at 16.

associated with wealthy communities using a disproportionate percentage of natural resources, and poor communities bearing a disproportionate burden of environmental degradation. The theme of environmental justice is relevant to numerous environmental issues that arise in both international and domestic contexts. Environmental justice issues confront both environmental degradation and some of the responsive solutions proposed. For example, in many metropolitan areas of industrialized countries, a disproportion of pollution-emitting facilities are located in or near low income neighborhoods. However, confronting this problem may compete with the goal of creating and retaining employment in these lower income communities. The United States Catholic Conference has recognized these competing concerns:

[I]n most countries today, including [the United States], it is the poor and the powerless who most directly bear the burden of current environmental carelessness. Their lands and neighborhoods are more likely to be polluted or to host toxic waste dumps, their water to be undrinkable, their children to be harmed. Too often, the structure of sacrifice involved in environmental *remedies* seems to exact a high price from the poor and from workers. Small farmers, industrial workers, lumberjacks, watermen, [and] rubber-tappers, for example, shoulder much of the weight of economic adjustment.¹⁶¹

On an international level, as third world countries industrialize, they are facing some of the same environmental problems that economically developed countries are beginning to mitigate. To accommodate third world development, international conventions on subjects such as air pollution and global warming have included concessions which allow developing countries to follow a less rigorous schedule of pollution cutbacks than industrialized countries. These accommodations have led critics to charge that, as wealthier economies look to developing countries to provide more goods, the latter will bear a growing disproportion of continued environmental degradation. In remarks during a 1991 conference dedicated to Saint Francis, Pope John Paul II warned that the "goods of the earth, which in the divine plan should be a common patrimony . . . often risk becoming the monopoly of a

¹⁶¹ RENEWING THE EARTH, *supra* note 6, at 2 (emphasis added).

few who often spoil it and, sometimes, destroy it, thereby creating a loss for all humanity."¹⁶²

In addressing environmental justice issues, Catholic bishops and theologians have relied on well-established principles of Catholic social teaching, including the common good, solidarity, subsidiarity, and an option for the poor.¹⁶³ The principle of Catholic social teaching most often invoked to address environmental justice issues is the common good. In *Gaudium et Spes*, the Second Vatican Council stated: "God intended the earth and all it contains for the use of every human being and people."¹⁶⁴ Invoking the tradition of the common good, Pope John Paul II has observed that "the earth is ultimately a common heritage, the fruits of which are for the benefit of all."¹⁶⁵ In his encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, the Pope declared that the state has an obligation to provide "for the defence and preservation of common good such as the natural and human

¹⁶² *Id.* at 8 (quoting Pope John Paul II, Address at the Conference of the Second Edition of the St. Francis *Canticle of Creatures* International Award for the Environment (Oct. 25, 1991)).

¹⁶³ Indeed, there are scattered, brief references to environmental concerns (particularly with respect to equitable use of natural resources within the common good) in several of the more important documents of modern Catholic social teaching. For example, there is a statement in "*Rerum Novarum* (1891) . . . that the goods of the earth are to be shared by all." Deborah D. Blake, *Toward a Sustainable Ethic: Virtue and the Environment*, in "AND GOD SAW THAT IT WAS GOOD": CATHOLIC THEOLOGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT 198 (Drew Christiansen & Walter Grazer eds., 1996). "*Quadragesimo Anno* (1931) sustained the theme of the shared use of natural resources and suggested limits on private property to ensure equitable use." *Id.* at 199. Several of the documents of Vatican II continued this theme:

In *Pacem in Terris* (1963), John XXIII maintained that sharing natural resources was essential for attaining peace and justice. In *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), Paul VI reaffirmed the human responsibility to care for the earth (no. 67), and the necessity of just and equitable sharing of the earth's resources so that human persons can live in dignity and develop physically and spiritually (no. 69). The environmental impact of industrial nations and consumer culture was challenged in *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971), [which stated that] "because of irrational exploitation of nature, man is now in danger of destroying the earth and becoming a victim of degradation." John Paul II continued the themes of responsible use of environmental resources for all people and the criticism of consumer culture (e.g. *Redemptor Hominis* (1979); *Laborem Exercens* (1981)).

Id.

¹⁶⁴ *Gaudium et Spes* no. 69, quoted in BISHOPS OF THE HEARTLAND, *supra* note 5, at 14.

¹⁶⁵ Pope John Paul II, *supra* note 2, at 3.

environments.’¹⁶⁶ In *The Ecological Crisis*, the Pope quotes a document of the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, which declares: “‘God destined the earth and all it contains for the use of every individual and all peoples.’”¹⁶⁷ The Pope calls for a “more internationally coordinated approach to the management of the earth’s goods,” and emphasizes that there is now an “urgent moral need for a new solidarity” on this subject, “especially in relations between developing nations and those that are highly industrialized.”¹⁶⁸ He also calls for approaches that are sensitive to “the well-being of future generations.”¹⁶⁹

American Catholic bishops have also emphasized the common good in their statements on the environment. The U.S. Catholic Conference’s statement, *Renewing the Earth*, emphasizes the need “to stand with working men and women and poor and disadvantaged persons, whose lives are often impacted by ecological abuse and tradeoffs between environment and development.”¹⁷⁰ The Conference urges a balance in economic policies between sustenance of natural systems and employment opportunities for poor families.¹⁷¹ Recognizing “potential conflicts” in this area, the Conference states: “Solutions must be found that do not force us to choose between a decent environment and a decent life for workers.”¹⁷² The Bishops of the Heartland emphasize the common good as an objective at the heart of environmental stewardship:

In the Bible and the teaching tradition of the Church, these principles of land stewardship are evident:

- (1) The land is God’s;
- (2) People are God’s stewards on the land;
- (3) The land’s benefits are for everyone;
- (4) The land should be distributed equitably;

¹⁶⁶ RENEWING THE EARTH, *supra* note 6, at 7 (quoting POPE JOHN PAUL II, ON THE HUNDRETH ANNIVERSARY OF RERUM NOVARUM: CENTESIMUS ANNUS, no. 40 (May 1, 1991)).

¹⁶⁷ Pope John Paul II, *supra* note 2, at 3 (quoting POPE PAUL VI, PASTORAL CONSTITUTION ON THE CHURCH IN THE MODERN WORLD, GAUDIUM ET SPES, no. 69 (Dec. 7, 1965)).

¹⁶⁸ *Id.* (emphasis omitted).

¹⁶⁹ *Id.* at 2 (emphasis omitted).

¹⁷⁰ RENEWING THE EARTH, *supra* note 6, at 1.

¹⁷¹ *See id.* at 2.

¹⁷² *Id.* at 8.

- (5) The land should be conserved and restored;
- (6) Land use planning must consider social and environmental impacts;
- (7) Land use should be appropriate to land quality;
- (8) The land should provide a moderate livelihood;
- (9) The land's workers should be able to become the land's owners;
- (10) The land's mineral wealth should be shared.¹⁷³

Most recently, the bishops of the Columbia River Basin have encouraged an expanded concept of the common good which includes not only all people, but other components of creation as well. Invoking "the common good and the good of the commons," these bishops encourage "a Christian belief that the Earth is a sacred shared space, a creation of God intended to meet the needs of all God's creatures."¹⁷⁴ Their reflection also asserts that the commons of the earth is not for humans alone, but that it "is intended by God to provide for all of God's creatures as they live in ecological relation."¹⁷⁵ The Catholic Bishops of Appalachia have similarly stated that the concerns of "ecological community," along with those of "social" community and human dignity, should guide market needs in today's economies.¹⁷⁶

D. Respect for Human Life

Catholic authorities have also demanded a particular respect for the sanctity of human life as part of an overall strategy for protecting the environment. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* plainly states that "[m]an is [at] the summit of the Creator's work,"¹⁷⁷ and that human beings occupy the highest position in the "hierarchy of creatures" in this world.¹⁷⁸ Because of humanity's unique position in creation, with each individual having been fashioned in God's image and likeness and endowed with a soul, "[h]uman life stands under God's special protection"¹⁷⁹

¹⁷³ BISHOPS OF THE HEARTLAND, *supra* note 5, at 13.

¹⁷⁴ Bishops of the Columbia River Basin, *supra* note 5, at 3.

¹⁷⁵ *Id.* at 24-25.

¹⁷⁶ *At Home in the Web of Life*, *supra* note 73, at 34.

¹⁷⁷ CATECHISM, *supra* note 8, § 343 (emphasis omitted).

¹⁷⁸ *Id.* § 342 (emphasis omitted).

¹⁷⁹ RATZINGER, *supra* note 18, at 60.

In *Renewing the Earth*, the U.S. Catholic Conference recognizes that growth in the world's human population is an area "particularly cited as requiring greater care and judgment on the part of human beings."¹⁸⁰ The Conference acknowledges that "rapid population growth presents special problems and challenges that must be addressed in order to avoid damage done to the environment and to social development."¹⁸¹ Pope John Paul II has likewise stated that "[o]ne cannot deny the existence, especially in the southern hemisphere, of a demographic problem which creates difficulties for development," and that this has precipitated " 'a greater realization of the limits of available resources.' "¹⁸² Church authorities' statements addressing issues of growing world population have reflected the Church's views on human life and the spacing of births. The U.S. Catholic Conference has stated that "[t]he key factor . . . in dealing with population problems is sustainable social and economic development."¹⁸³ The Conference views with skepticism positions taken by "advantaged groups [that] often seem more intent on curbing Third-World births than on restraining the even more voracious consumerism of the developed world."¹⁸⁴ Therefore, the Conference encourages advanced economies to reduce their consumption of resources and the pollution that results from it.¹⁸⁵ The Conference does express a "respect for the freedom of married couples to decide voluntarily on the number and spacing of births," and "encourage[s] policies that promote natural family planning and true responsible parenthood."¹⁸⁶ Meanwhile, the Conference opposes "coercive methods of population control and programs that bias decisions through incentives or disincentives."¹⁸⁷

In their statements on population control issues, Catholic authorities have most emphatically rejected abortion and assisted suicide. Pope John Paul II has stated that " 'protecting the environment is first of all the right to live and the protection

¹⁸⁰ RENEWING THE EARTH, *supra* note 6, at 9.

¹⁸¹ *Id.*

¹⁸² *Id.* (citation omitted).

¹⁸³ *Id.*

¹⁸⁴ *Id.*

¹⁸⁵ *See id.*

¹⁸⁶ *Id.*

¹⁸⁷ *Id.*

of life.’¹⁸⁸ In *The Ecological Crisis*, the Pope states that the “[r]espect for life, and above all for the dignity of the human person, is the ultimate guiding norm for any sound economic, industrial or scientific progress.’¹⁸⁹ Similarly, the U.S. Catholic Conference has stated:

We must care for all God’s creatures, especially the most vulnerable. How, then, can we protect endangered species and at the same time be callous to the unborn, the elderly, or disabled persons? . . . The care of the earth will not be advanced by the destruction of human life at any stage of development.¹⁹⁰

E. Encouraging a Sacramental Sense of the Environment

Finally, addressing themselves particularly to members of the Church, Catholic bishops and theologians have sought to develop a greater appreciation for the goodness of nature and the presence of God in creation by encouraging Catholics to develop a “sacramental” view of the environment. In *Renewing the Earth*, the U.S. Catholic Conference identifies among the “integral dimensions of ecological responsibility” drawn from Catholic social teaching a “*God-centered and sacramental view of the universe.*”¹⁹¹ A “sacramental” view of the environment is simply one that reveals God’s presence.¹⁹² “The essence of a sacrament is the capacity to reveal grace,” and nature reveals God.¹⁹³ As stated in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, “God speaks to man through the visible creation. The material cosmos is so presented to man’s intelligence that he can read there traces of its Creator.”¹⁹⁴ The U.S. Catholic Conference has expressed the hope that “[t]he Christian vision of a sacramental universe—a world that discloses the Creator’s presence by visible and tangible signs—[will] contribute to making the earth a home for the human family once again” by giving people a greater appreciation for their responsibility of stewardship over the environment.¹⁹⁵ More recently, the Bishops of the Columbia

¹⁸⁸ *Id.* at 10 (quoting Pope John Paul II, Homily at Quiaba, Mato Grasso, Brazil (Oct. 16, 1991)).

¹⁸⁹ Pope John Paul II, *supra* note 2, at 3.

¹⁹⁰ RENEWING THE EARTH, *supra* note 6, at 9–10.

¹⁹¹ *Id.* at 5.

¹⁹² *Id.* at 6.

¹⁹³ Haught, *supra* note 62, at 51 (citation and internal quotations omitted).

¹⁹⁴ CATECHISM, *supra* note 8, §1147.

¹⁹⁵ RENEWING THE EARTH, *supra* note 6, at 6.

River Basin have combined the concepts of a sacramental understanding of nature and the common good to encourage “a sacramental commons.”¹⁹⁶ “To really believe that creation is sacramental means that Catholics cannot ignore the effect of their individual or collective actions on the rest of creation.”¹⁹⁷

A sacramental sense of nature is, indeed, deeply rooted in Catholic tradition. Throughout the history of the Church, Catholics have consciously used symbols from nature in most of the seven sacraments. “The sacraments of the Church . . . purify and integrate all the richness of the signs and symbols of the cosmos”¹⁹⁸ The best example of this symbolism is in the Eucharist. Since the *Didache* was written, Catholics have associated two symbols from nature—the wheat field and the vineyard—with the Eucharist.¹⁹⁹ Teilhard de Chardin expanded on this symbolism to explain his own sacramental sense of the universe in his “Mass on the World”:

I, your priest, will make the whole earth my altar and on it will offer you all the labours and sufferings of the world

I will place on my paten, O God, the harvest to be won by this renewal of labour. Into my chalice I shall pour all the sap which is to be pressed out this day from the earth’s fruits

Over every living thing which is to spring up, to grow, to flower, to ripen during this day say again the words: This is my Body. And over every death-force which waits in readiness to corrode, to wither, to cut down, speak again your commanding words which express the supreme mystery of faith: This is my Blood.²⁰⁰

F. The Sabbath and the Jubilee 2000

Closely related to a sacramental sense of creation is the Judeo-Christian tradition of the Sabbath. The Sabbath, marking the day when God rested after creating the world in *Genesis*, is a tradition that “enjoins respect for the integrity of creation.”²⁰¹

¹⁹⁶ Bishops of the Columbia River Basin, *supra* note 5, at 4.

¹⁹⁷ *Introduction to “AND GOD SAW THAT IT WAS GOOD”: CATHOLIC THEOLOGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT 7* (Drew Christiansen & Walter Grazer eds., 1996).

¹⁹⁸ CATECHISM, *supra* note 8, §1152.

¹⁹⁹ See Daly, *supra* note 89, at 54.

²⁰⁰ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Mass on the World*, in *HYMN OF THE UNIVERSE 19–23* (1969).

²⁰¹ CATECHISM, *supra* note 8, § 2415.

The Third Commandment requires rest on the Sabbath, in part as a gesture of this respect. Catholics carry out the tradition of Sabbath rest on Sundays,²⁰² marking the resurrection of Christ and the New Creation.²⁰³ The central event of each Sunday for the Church is the Sunday Eucharist, “the foundation and confirmation of all Christian practice.”²⁰⁴

The Judeo-Christian tradition of the Sabbath includes other observances in addition to a weekly day of rest. “In biblical times, the practice of the *sabbatical year* in which the land was left fallow every seven years, was one way in which farmers sought to conserve the land.”²⁰⁵ “God instruct[ed] the people of Israel to proclaim a jubilee,²⁰⁶ a ‘sabbath of sabbaths,’ every fifty years.”²⁰⁷ In *Leviticus*, God instructs the Israelites:

The fiftieth year will be a jubilee year for you; in it you will not sow, you will not harvest the grain that has come up on its own or in it gather grapes from your untrimmed vine. The jubilee will be a holy thing for you; during it you will eat whatever the fields produce.²⁰⁸

This “rest for the land” was intended, in part, “to remind the ancient Israelites that God was the ultimate and only absolute owner of the land.”²⁰⁹ The Jubilee Year also included three other practices: freedom for slaves, cancellation of debts, and redistribution of the land back to its original, ancestral owners from the twelve tribes of Israel.²¹⁰ This last requirement “reinforced the Jewish belief that the land was given by God to all the people.”²¹¹

²⁰² See *id.* § 2184. The Church’s positioning of Easter during the spring season (in the northern hemisphere, at least), when nature witnesses a “rebirth,” is intended to provide a natural context for this most solemn celebration of the paschal mystery. See Kevin W. Irwin, *The Sacramentality of Creation and the Role of Creation in Liturgy and Sacraments*, in “AND GOD SAW THAT IT WAS GOOD”: CATHOLIC THEOLOGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT 105, 125 (Drew Christiansen & Walter Grazer eds., 1996).

²⁰³ See CATECHISM, *supra* note 8, § 1169.

²⁰⁴ *Id.* § 2181.

²⁰⁵ BISHOPS OF THE HEARTLAND, *supra* note 5, at 17.

²⁰⁶ The Jubilee Year was the year following seven successions of seven years. See *Leviticus* 25:8–9.

²⁰⁷ Bishops of the Columbia River Basin, *supra* note 5, at 25.

²⁰⁸ *Leviticus* 25:11–12.

²⁰⁹ Bishops of the Columbia River Basin, *supra* note 5, at 26.

²¹⁰ See *id.* at 3–4, 26–27 (citing *Leviticus* 25:10; *Deuteronomy* 15:1–2).

²¹¹ Bishops of the Heartland, *supra* note 5, at 15.

Pope John Paul II has emphatically declared the year 2000 to be a Jubilee Year for the Catholic Church.²¹² Other Catholic bishops and theologians have discussed how, on this occasion, Catholics can apply the Judeo-Christian traditions of the Jubilee to environmental issues in our times. In their recent reflection, the Bishops of the Columbia River Basin urge the following “contemporary expressions of the Jubilee Year”:

Rest for the land will be implemented by *responsible care for the ecosystem entrusted by God to our care. . . .*

Freedom for slaves will be implemented as *freedom for the poor of the land. . . .* God intended a universal destination—an equitable distribution—of the goods God provided for human use. . . .

Cancellation of debts will be implemented by an *economic restructuring based on the needs of the poor. . . .*

Land redistribution will be implemented by a *just redistribution of the land and water and the rights pertaining to each, to benefit the common good.*²¹³

CONCLUSION

As the above discussions demonstrate, Catholic tradition, theology, and social teaching are all relevant to the environmental challenges that the world is facing today. Catholic tradition holds that the resources of our environment are good in their own right, that God is present within them, and that they are involved in an ongoing process of creation and redemption of the universe. For these reasons alone, humanity should respect all of creation and refrain from interfering with its processes. Tradition also holds that humanity should remain “at peace” with the environment, because we are part of creation and depend on it for our survival. Most significantly, Catholic tradition holds that humanity’s responsibilities toward the environment are rooted in a stewardship of creation that God has given us as beings created in his image, and “co-workers” charged with implementing his creative and redemptive plan.

²¹² See Pope John Paul II, *Incarnationis Mysterium*, Bull of Indiction of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 (visited Feb. 18, 2000) < http://www.vatican.va/jubilee_2000/docs/documents/hf_jp-ii_doc_30111998_bolla-jubilee_en.html>.

²¹³ Bishops of the Columbia River Basin, *supra* note 5, at 33.

Humankind has, indeed, crossed a technological threshold into a new level of control over the earth. In this new age, Catholic theology and social teaching are calling on people to regard “the ecological crisis” as a moral imperative, and, in doing so, to respect the process of creation, to sustain our dependent relationship with the rest of the created world, and to fulfill our obligations as stewards of creation. Church leaders have instructed Catholics in particular to regard their role within creation as an important element of faith, and to adopt a new “sacramental” sense of their natural environment. Meanwhile, Church leaders have urged the world community as a whole (and particularly more affluent, industrialized communities) to reform practices affecting the environment. The most important of these reforms should include authentic development, respect for the universal common good (and especially for the interests of the poor) in the use of natural resources, and a particular concern for human life. Meanwhile, Catholic authorities have encouraged theologians, scientists, civic and industrial leaders and others to continue dialogue and research in pursuit of new insights on how humanity can apply the truth to foster a more authentic relationship between itself and the rest of creation.

This is no small task. Indeed, it is a set of essential challenges that will engage humanity not only during Jubilee Years, but for the rest of our earthly existence.

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