The Catholic Social Teaching on Stewardship: Respect for Human Dignity and The Integrity of Creation

Reynaldo D. Raluto

With the increasing attention given to environmental issues and problems in today's world, this paper delves deeply into the Catholic social teaching (CST) on ecology, stewardship of the environment, and integrity of creation. The ecological crisis has reached global proportions, affecting entire ecosystems and displacing millions of people from their habitats. Although Leo XIII mentioned environmental issues in his landmark encyclical on the condition of the workers, it was during the Second Vatican Council and thereafter that magisterial teaching on the ecology reflected deeply on emerging concerns over the earth's degradation and destruction. Papal encyclicals highlighted the adverse effects of environmental destruction on the poorest of the poor and the creation of new forms of inequality. Recent popes also highlighted the structural causes of environmental degradation and called on governments and other institutions to act on the principle of justice and the common good. With all these statements, however, Catholic social teaching on ecology has remained largely anthropocentric, and thus rests on older attitudes that prevent a more integrated and nuanced approach in addressing environmental problems. The paper calls for the "greening" of CST by engaging with emerging movements toward committed environmental activism, conservation movements, and moves for a more sustainable future.

Introduction

The ecological concern is relatively new in Filipino theological reflection. The interest of the majority of Filipino contextual theologians revolves around socio-political concerns. Today, due to our tragic experiences with the ecological crisis, we realized that ecology is an urgent theological issue. What does

Catholic social teaching (CST) say about caring for the environment? Have we responded adequately to the ecological issues? These are the guiding questions of this paper.

This paper begins by seeing the global reality of the ecological crisis, paying attention to the present negative fact that the Earth is in a crisis situation. We then turn to the CST and map out the development of its theological responses to the ecological crisis. This will allow us to critically assess its ecological theology. The last part of this paper mentions the achievements and challenges of responding to the ecological crisis that needs to be pursued by subsequent theological reflection and teaching.

A GLOBAL AWARENESS OF THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

The term "ecology" came from the Greek word *oikos*, which literally means "household."[1] In that sense, ecology is the "study of the house"—the Earth, which is the *house* of all earthly species. Accordingly, it was Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919) who coined the German term *Ökologie* that appeared for the first time in the scientific scene in 1866. When ecology emerged as a science in the second half of the nineteenth century, its main aim was to study the relationship of the organism to the environment from a Darwinian perspective. Haeckel's study of the Darwinian notion of the "conditions of the struggle for existence" led directly into ecology. Today, it has been proposed that an ecological science, in order to be relevant, must not only be concerned with the balance of nature or with the fluctuating population of species, but also with calamities associated with the ecological crisis.[2]

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[1] Significantly, Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) proposed to view the world as a "household." He wrote: "The world is not such that a thing is unrelated to another, but it is always a definite something. For all things are ordered together a common center, as in a *household*....". See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, translated by Richard Hope (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1960), no. 1075a11-25, 267.

[2] On this proposal, see Donald Worster, "The Ecology of Order and Chaos," *Environmental History Review* 14 (1989): 1-18; see also Donald Worster, "Nature and Disorder of History," *Environmental History Review* 18 (1994): 1-15;

To Love and Care for this Beautiful Planet

Seeing the beautiful face of the Earth is important for nourishing our ecological advocacy. We usually care for the things we love, and spontaneously love what is beautiful. Similarly, we care for the Earth mainly because we love this beautiful planet. Arguably, we can only love this "whole" planet—as it ought to be loved—after seeing and contemplating its beauty. But how can we possibly take a loving contemplative look at this planet if we are inside it? As the saying goes, "one cannot see the picture when one is standing inside the frame." This seems to imply that if we are inside the Earth, we can never contemplate its beauty as it truly is.

Fortunately, with the achievements of photography, we are able to see our planet within the vast cosmic order. In this regard, two significant contributions of photography to our ecological vision of the Earth may be made. First, on Christmas Eve of 1968, astronauts of the Apollo 8 mission took pictures of the Earth and brought back to us the first photographs of the Earth from the moon. Accordingly, the widespread publication of this Earth photograph gave rise to a worldwide environmental awareness movement, which led to the launching of an annual Earth Day in 1970. It also pushed world governments to enact environmental protection laws.[3] Second, in December of 1972, the Apollo 17 mission produced a fully illuminated picture of the Earth, which became the most commonly published photograph of the Earth in our time. Thanks to these available snapshots, our generation may now see the Earth as a planet in its full spherical contours. The celebrated photographs have made us realize that the interconnected ecosystems of the Earth and humankind make up a single entity. This new vision of the Earth as a single ecosystem reveals that the survival of human beings essentially depends on the life-support systems of the planet.

Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 342-433.

[3] On this account, see Eugene Odum, *Ecology: A Bridge between Science and Society* (Sunderland: Sinauer Associates, 1997), 2.

After contemplating these beautiful pictures, we are challenged to turn our gaze back to the "real" face of the Earth with its sublime and terrifying realities. We experience the wild side of nature which can, at times, be threatening to life. In fact, as geological history shows, our intimacy with the natural world entails a "struggle for existence." We have to struggle to survive against dangerous and violent forces of nature. We realize that the Earth has a wild and uncontrollable nature that "could render violence, storms, droughts, and general chaos."[4] Today, with climate change, we realize the fragility and finitude of our planet in the face of human-induced ecological crises. The Earth that appears harmoniously beautiful from the moon actually reveals some ugly "scars" and suffers from bleeding "wounds." As earthly creatures, we need to really care for this living planet *as* ourselves. This worldview compels us to address the ecological crisis that alarmingly threatens our very survival within the community of life.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE GLOBAL ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

Three interrelated issues that characterize the present global ecological crisis may be made. First, there is increasing scarcity of material and energy sources which the prevailing model of economic development unsustainably exploits to their limits. The alarming scarcity of material sources is evident in the ongoing forest denudation and its "domino effects." The remaining forest cover on Earth proves to be insufficient as severe soil erosion and other land-related destruction of the ecosystem have already been observed. With the continuing decline of the forests comes the shortage of fresh water supply in many parts of the world, especially in developing countries. Furthermore, the survival of living species has been severely affected by the loss of forests that serve as natural habitat to at least, 50 percent of the Earth's living species. The unnatural extinction of many living species due to

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[4] Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983), 2.

forest destruction could eventually lead to the deprivation of the "ecosystem services" that maintain a healthy environment.

Studies also reveal that we have been unsustainably exploiting our non-renewable energy sources since 1750, the onset of the Industrial Revolution in the West. To date, we have not yet sufficiently developed an appropriate technology captures and stores solar energy in more efficient but less expensive ways. Accordingly, this technological limitation explains why industrialized countries still heavily depend on non-renewable fossil fuels (e.g., oil, natural gas, and coal) to energize their growing economies. The environmental costs of these unsustainable practices are evident in the increasing scarcity of energy sources and in the decreasing capacity of the Earth's natural systems to absorb the startling wastes of used up energy.

The second global ecological crisis has something to do with the ongoing destruction of the Earth's atmosphere and oceans—the so-called main planetary sinks of the ecosystem. The Earth's oceans and atmosphere can no longer cope with the enormous material and energy wastes emitted from economic processes. To show this, let us point out two interrelated harmful effects of these accumulated wastes on our planetary sinks. First, these harmful wastes produce greenhouse gases (GHGs) that abnormally concentrate in the thin layer of the earth's atmosphere. They form like a thick "blanket" in the atmosphere, as they trap heat from the sun and prevent it from bouncing back to the atmosphere. Consequently, the findings of many scientific studies show that the earth's climate system has warmed by over 0.7 degrees Celsius in the last 100 years. As the group of Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) scientists has pointed out, there is discernible increase "in global average air and ocean temperatures, widespread melting of snow and ice and rising global average sea level."[5] Second, as oceans absorb a considerable amount of GHGs (e.g., carbon dioxide) from the atmosphere, their pH level (i.e., the measure of the concentration of hydrogen ions) reduces until they become abnormally acidic

[5] Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), *Climate Change 2007: Synthesis Report* (Valencia, Spain: IPCC, 2007), 30.

and uninhabitable to most marine species. Apparently, both damages to the planetary sinks create a domino effect on other ecosystems.

Finally, there is a growing poverty among peoples who are unjustly affected by the global ecological crisis. Scientists warned that climate change will adversely affect most people, particularly lower income populations. This is especially the case in many developing countries in the tropics because they lack the technological means for adaptation in the face of ecological calamities. Even today, we can already observe how poorer countries unjustly suffer from the major disastrous ecological consequences of climate change. As pointed out, although industrialized countries are the significant producers of human-induced greenhouse gases, it is the poorer countries that bear the cost of environmental damages. If this trend continues, global incidence of poverty will rise alongside increasing numbers of environmental refugees and other migration-related problems.

Drawing from the Resources of Catholic Social Teaching

Although the Church's awareness of the ecological crisis is relatively recent, the overarching theological concept of stewardship, which occupies the dominant perspective of the Church's response to the ecological crisis, is not new. From a Christian perspective, the theology of stewardship is based on the biblical belief that the "earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it." (Ps 24:1). This means that human beings are not the absolute owners of the earth but caretakers put by God "in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it." (Gen 2:15). As narrated in the Story of Creation, God mandated human beings to exercise "dominion" over their fellow creatures (Gen 1:26) and to "subdue" the earth (Gen 1:28). Unfortunately, as history unfolds, human beings have misinterpreted this divine command by falsely assuming that they are over and above non-human material creatures. This distorted anthropocentric (or human-centered) assumption has been criticized as one of the main causes of the present ecological crisis.

To correct the erroneous anthropocentric assumption, the social teaching of the contemporary Magisterium reminds that human beings are God's stewards, and that stewardship has to be understood in terms of responsible shepherding. This renewed theology of stewardship has pushed the Church to recognize the value of human life and the integrity of creation as inseparable fundamental moral principles. As we shall see below, maintaining the right tension between these two fundamental moral principles is not easy on the part of the Magisterium, which commits to a certain anthropocentrism.

Twelve years before Leo XIII issued the first social encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (RN) in 1891, he issued *Aeterni Patris* (1879)—the encyclical that reaffirmed the doctrinal authority of St. Thomas Aquinas as "the Catholic Philosopher". The former significantly reveals that the Magisterium has decidedly appropriated Thomistic perspectives on stewardship, which is based on the Aristotelian principle that the superior has to govern the inferior. Accordingly, it is in keeping with this natural order that humans have to govern non-humans. Thus, on the classical question "Whether Adam in the state of innocence had mastership over the animals," Aquinas unambiguously answered:

> The imperfect is for the use of the perfect; as the plants make use of the earth for their nourishment, and animals make use of plants, and man makes use of both plants and animals. Therefore it is in keeping with the order of nature, that man should be master over animals.[6]

It is clear that *Rerum novarum* appropriated this anthropocentric view in its theology of stewardship. This is evident in its recognition of the "natural differences," as well as the "necessary inequality" among human beings, as part of the "natural hierarchy" of beings which must be respected if we want to maintain the natural order (RN 26).The encyclical also teaches

[6] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Vol 4 (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, Ltd., 1922), I, Question XCVI, art. 1, 326-329.

that material property is "completely at man's disposal" (RN 9) because only human beings possess "intrinsic value" (i.e., value for its own sake), while the rest of the material world merely have "instrumental value" (i.e. value that depends on its usage). This Thomistic anthropocentric attitude towards non-human creatures tends to become exploitative and abusive, and cannot foreground an adequate ecological perspective for articulating the proper relationship between human and non-human beings.

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) has been described as "the greatest event in the last four centuries of Catholicism" that caused several "Copernican revolutions," particularly in ecclesiological thinking. From an ecological perspective, however, this Council remains largely anthropocentric in its perspective on human beings' relationship with material creation. *Gaudium et spes*, for instance, uncritically maintains the ecological perspective of *Rerum novarum* that non-human creatures have only instrumental value, as they are created by God "on man's account" (GS 39). Furthermore, when the Council spoke about environmental issues, it did so in the context of economic life, such as the issues related to material ownership and the universal destination of created goods (GS 69). It should also be noted, however, that the Council strongly encourages that, in cases of extreme necessity, the poor can legitimately take from the goods of the earth what is necessary for themselves and their family (GS 69). This may suggest an upward approach to change. Nevertheless, let me reiterate that, in light of its anthropocentric stewardship, *Gaudium et spes* fails to extend its notion of the common good to the broader creational level.

In the postconciliar era, Paul VI's first social encyclical *Populorum progressio* maintains the Second Vatican Council's perspective on stewardship in his response to poverty—the "social question [that] has become worldwide" (PP 3). This encyclical is famous for endorsing the notion of "integral human development"—a development that is not restricted to economic growth, but more so directed to "each [person] and of the whole [person]" (PP 14). This notion serves as Paul VI's criterion for criticizing the prevailing model of economic development. However, this encyclical has also been criticized for appropriating

a top-down approach for social change (PP 44, 48-49, 71-74, 81, 83-85), and for remaining silent about ecological issues brought about by Western models of economic development. As we shall see below, Paul VI tried his best to address these serious lacunae in his subsequent Catholic social teaching.

In his 1971 apostolic letter *Octogesima adveniens*, Paul VI advanced his global perspective on the common good by criticizing the negative impact of exploitative modern development on the natural environment. The pope warns that irresponsible "exploitation of nature" in the name of development is "a wide-ranging social problem which concerns the entire human family" (OA 21). This awareness of the unsustainable dominant model of economic development is a more advanced analysis on global poverty. Like in the previous social teaching, however, *Octogesima Adveniens* also maintains a top-down approach to alleviate the poor from their oppressive situation (OA 23), and proposes an anthropocentric response to the challenges of the ecological crisis.

The 1971 Synod of Bishops produced a landmark document, *Justitia in Mundo* (JM), which made a definite stand on the participation of the oppressed in decision-making and social transformation (JM 77). Quite different from the previous CST, this synodal document rightly saw the intimate connection between global justice and ecology. This perspective allowed the bishops to oblige rich countries, in the name of "absolute justice," to share the goods of the Earth with all the members of the human race (JM 70, 11, 12). The bishops were aware of the fact that poorer countries unjustly suffered from the adverse effects of environmental exploitation in the name of economic development. For this reason, the bishops boldly declared that richer nations have no right "to keep up their claim to increase their own material demands" if this practice would lead either to the misery of others or to the destruction of "the very physical foundations of life on earth" (JM 70). The bishops felt the need for a "new recognition of the material limits of the biosphere" (JM 12). They also foresaw the negative effects of high rates of consumption and pollution that leads to irreparable damage to the essential elements of life on Earth and to the whole of

humanity (JM 11). Thus, as early as 1971, the bishops encouraged all people—including the poor—"to cooperate with God to bring about liberation from every sin and to build a world which will reach the fullness of creation" (JM 77). However, this synodal statement, like previous social teachings, remains anthropocentric because it treats ecological issues in the context of global justice.

In his subsequent international messages, Paul VI continued to view ecological issues from the perspective of global justice. This can be discerned in his 1972 Message to the United Nations Conference on the Environment that considered human misery as "the worst pollution".[7] Apparently, this view implies that people's development is a more urgent concern than the ecological crisis. Paul VI's 1977 Address also revealed a similar approach to social issues when he called for "a universal sense of solidarity" among nations "to ensure an ecologically sound environment for people today as well as for future generations".[8] Again, this implies that Paul VI cares for the environment not for its own sake, but only for the interest of humanity. In this same address, the pope also reaffirmed a top-down approach to change, as he called for "a change of mentality, for conversion of attitude and of practice *so that the rich* willingly use less and share the earth's goods more widely and more wisely".[9] Thus, it can be said that Paul VI's CST in general did not only fail to adequately recognize the capacity of the poor for social transformation but also remained anthropocentric in its perspective on justice and ecology.

John Paul II, in his twenty-seven years as pope, treated ecological issues extensively in his social teaching. His first encyclical *Redemptor hominis* reaffirms Paul VI's analysis on the intimate connection between modern economic development and the ecological crisis. John Paul II was alarmed by ecological threats brought about by arms race and industrial development, which

[7] Paul VI, "Message to the United Nations Conference on the Environment," *Origins* 2 (June 22, 1972): 76-77.

[8] Paul VI, "Address on the Occasion of the Fifth World Day of the Environment," *Catholic Mind* 75 (December, 1977): 10-11.

[9] Paul VI, "Address on the Occasion of the Fifth World Day of the Environment," 11. [Emphasis added].

deplete the Earth by "dilapidating at an accelerated pace material and energy resources, and compromising the geophysical environment" (RH 16). Like his predecessor, he was aware of the exploitative approach of economic production to meet the demands of consumerism that produced enormous waste and polluted the environment—thus, making this world a dangerous place to live in. For John Paul II, we cannot overcome these unsustainable practices unless human beings would undergo "a true conversion of mind, will and heart" (RH 16).

The 1987 encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis* is truly significant in that it calls for everyone to respect the "integrity of creation" (SRS 34). John Paul II provided three explanations on the meaning of the "integrity of creation." First, integrity of creation means that one cannot simply use created realities according to what one wishes; instead, we need to "take into account the nature of each being and of its mutual connection in an ordered system, which is precisely the cosmos" (SRS 34). He reminded us of our moral duty to recognize the value of each creature in relation to the "ordered system" of the cosmos, apart from its instrumental value to humans. Second, to respect the integrity of creation means to consider the limitations and renewability of finite natural resources. It would be a violation to the integrity of creation to use the Earth's resources "as if they were inexhaustible": to do so would seriously endanger the availability of natural resources "not only for the present generation but above all for generations to come" (SRS 34). Third, the notion of the integrity of creation urgently calls us to respect the limits of the regulative capacity of the natural environment to cope with excessive waste coming from uncontrolled industrialization (SRS 34).

In his message for the 1990 World Day of Peace, *Peace with God the Creator*, John Paul II again mentioned "integrity of creation" together with the more established principle of human dignity. He affirmed the inseparability of these moral principles by emphasizing that "[r]espect for life and for the dignity of the human person extends also to the rest of creation" (PGC 16). God created the universe as a "cosmos endowed with its own integrity" and "internal, dynamic balance" which must be duly

respected (PGC 8) and preserved for the well-being of future generations" (PGC 15). The sustainability of human society thus essentially depends on the balance of nature and the integrity of creation. This formal declaration to include respect for the integrity of creation—together with the respect for the dignity of human life—is quite novel in the papal Magisterium's moral perspective on stewardship.

It must also be acknowledged that John Paul II emphasizes the intimate connection between the ecological crisis and structural poverty. Part of addressing the problem of the ecological crisis is to directly engage "the structural forms of poverty that exist throughout the world" (PGC 11). This is advanced view, but he seems to be ambivalent in his analysis on the effects of structural forms of poverty on the ecological crisis. John Paul II tends to uncritically subscribe to a simplistic analysis that the poor are the main culprit of soil exhaustion, deforestation, and destruction of natural heritage (PGC 11). Elsewhere, however, he also claims that "it would be wrong to assign responsibility to the poor alone for the negative environmental consequences of their actions" (PGC 11). In any case, the pope saw that both rich and poor have partially contributed—although in different degrees—to the present ecological crisis.

In *Centesimus annus*, John Paul II presented a theology of stewardship in light of "human being as a worker." The encyclical emphasizes that it is a human vocation to develop the natural fruitfulness and productivity of the Earth through work (CA 31). This humanistic perspective teaches that the right to have individual property should be based on the right to work. Thus, to prevent human beings from having their own part of God's gift is tantamount to preventing them from actualizing their human vocation to work and their responsibility to dominate the Earth (CA 31). John Paul II's earlier encyclical *Laborem exercens* (LE), promulgated in 1981, already appropriated this humanistic conception of work, emphasizing that human beings do not only transform nature but also cooperate to achieve their human fulfillment through work (LE 9). John Paul II also considered the use of technology as "the ally of work" that would make the Earth

more productive and capable in satisfying legitimate human needs (CA 5, 31). John Paul II also posed a challenge to be critical about the use of technology. Elsewhere, the encyclical invites us to discern whether or not technology realizes the "prior God-given purpose" of the integrity of creation, and whether or not it respects the dignity of the human person (CA 37). As we have said, maintaining these two ethical criteria dialectically has been a constant struggle among moral theologians today.

Another important point in *Centesimus annus* is its moral analysis on the ecological crisis. Unlike previous social teaching, CE sees the intimate connection between the "senseless destruction of the environment" and human sin. As John Paul II argued, the whole of creation was made to suffer due to human sin, which disrupted God's plan for creation. He appealed to biblical revelation to affirm that the ecological crisis is rooted in the "anthropological error," in which human beings have misinterpreted the divine command to "subdue" the Earth by becoming irresponsible stewards of creation. Humans erroneously assumed that they can "make arbitrary use of the earth…as though it did not have its own requisites and prior God-given purpose" (CA 37). To correct this error, John Paul II called for a rethinking of notions of stewardship in light of the renewed understanding of the principles of human dignity and integrity of creation.

The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace published in 2004 the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (CSDC), which contains one chapter on "Safeguarding the Environment" (CSDC 451-487). This chapter offers a collection of quotations from John Paul II's social teaching on ecology. The *Compendium* categorically avoids two extreme ecological perspectives. On one hand, it condemns the view that tends to absolutize human beings' "technical dominion over nature" such that the natural environment is treated as mere raw material to be manipulated at our pleasure (CSDC 463). On the other hand, it rejects views that affirm the intrinsic value in nature, treat it as something more important than the human person (CSDC 463). To clarify its position, the Magisterium proposes to recognize "*both* the intrinsic value of all creatures *and* the unique dignity of the human

person."[10] This position is expressed in the notion of "human ecology" that emphasizes the role of human family as the first and fundamental "sanctuary of life" where human beings learn to respect their neighbor and to love nature (CSDC 463).

As can be seen in the previous discussion, John Paul II significantly advanced CST on ecology as compared to his predecessors. He has a clearer perception of the magnitude and urgency of the current ecological problems. At this juncture, two aspects are worth noting. On one hand, he foresaw that the ecological crisis could lead to the "abyss" if we continue the "business as usual" attitude. For this reason, he calls for "ecological conversion" by challenging the people to be "more sensitive to catastrophe to which it has been heading."[11] John Paul II remained optimistic that many of the human-induced ecological damages "can still be halted" if we take our common responsibility seriously (PGC 6). There is no doubt that this trend cannot be changed without the cooperation of industrialized nations. But did John Paul II encourage poorer countries to participate in this ecological struggle? As pointed out, he maintained an upward approach to change until *Laborem exercens* (1981). However, his position in *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (1987) onwards has been criticized as "a backward step," as it did not encourage the poor to become key agents of change.[12] This return to the top-down approach is crucial because the poor comprise the majority of victims of the ecological crisis.

On the other hand, John Paul II's social teaching on ecology tends to maintain an anthropocentric approach to the ecological crisis. His social teachings implicitly recognize the "intrinsic value" of non-human creation both in his emphasis on the inviolable value of life (CA 37) and in his treatment of the "integrity of creation" (SRS 34). The *Catechism of the Catholic*

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[10] Denis Edwards, "The Integrity of Creation: Catholic Social Teaching for an Ecological Age," in *Pacifica* 5 (1992): 182-203, 194.

[11] John Paul II, *God Made Man the Steward of Creation,* no. 4 (17 January 2001).

[12] On this critique, see Donal Dorr, *Option for the Poor: A Hundred Years of Catholic Social Teaching,* Revised and expanded edition (New York: Orbis, 1992), 332.

Church (CCC) also affirms that "each creature possesses its own particular goodness and dignity" (CCC 339). However, his recognition of the "intrinsic value" of non-human creatures has not changed the anthropocentric tone of his social teaching. This is evident in his emphasis on human ecology and in the priority given to human dignity. He reiterates, for instance, that the human being "is at the summit of the Creator's work" (CCC 343), emphasizes the instrumental value of non-human creatures. At best, we may describe his social teaching as ecologically conscious yet his interest in the care for creation remains anthropocentric.

To mark the fortieth anniversary of *Populorum progressio*, Benedict XVI issued the encyclical *Caritas in veritate* (2009) a few months before the commencement of the United Nations (UN) Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, Denmark. Although the encyclical devoted four sections on environmental concerns, many were disappointed that he did not speak more about climate change issues. Nevertheless, three important ecological concerns are worth mentioning. First, *Caritas in veritate* affirms the importance of the principle of "intergenerational justice," which proposes a solidarity that "embraces time and space." It broadens our notion of justice by recognizing "our grave duty to hand the earth on to future generations in such a condition that they too can worthily inhabit it and continue to cultivate it."[13] In that sense, it would be a violation of the principle of "solidarity and inter-generational justice" if our present generation would bequeath to future generations a planet which is depleted of its resources (CV 48).

Second, *Caritas in veritate* calls us to treat nature as human beings treat themselves. It explained, "every violation of solidarity and civic friendship harms the environment, just as environment deterioration in turn upsets relations in society" (CV 51). Indeed, if human and natural ecology are inseparable, it would be self-destructive for human beings to destroy the natural environment.

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[13] Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate: On Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth* (29 June 2009), no. 50.

Third, *Caritas in veritate* asserts that the Church must prioritize the defense of humankind from the danger of self-destruction. The Church "must defend not only earth, water and air as gifts of creation that belongs to everyone. She must also above all protect mankind from self-destruction" (CV 51). Benedict XVI reaffirmed that the destruction of the quality of human environment is the "more urgent" issue, as it concerns human being whose dignity is inviolable (CV 51).

To advance his ecological concerns, Benedict XVI delivered a message for the 2010 World Day of Peace with the theme *If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation* (CPPC). As the theme suggests, responding to the ecological issues is part of the process of achieving global peace. Benedict XVI is aware of the escalating ecological crisis that threatens all of humankind. His Message emphasizes that human beings can never be at peace in a troubled environment. It challenges world leaders at all levels to work together for peace by protecting the environment. Following his predecessor, he reminded world leaders that "the protection of creation and peacemaking are profoundly linked" (CPPC 14).

In the same Message, Benedict XVI also reaffirmed several aspects already found in his previous encyclical. The following quotation from his 2010 papal message *If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation* (CPPC) highlights his deep awareness of the growing ecological crisis and his reason why the Church should address it:

> 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? (CPPC 4)

Apparently, the answer to these questions is no. The reason is clear: "All these are issues with a profound impact on the exercise of human rights, such as the right to life, food, health and development" (CPPC 4). He does not want us to remain neutral and silent on ecological issues involving human rights: "We cannot remain indifferent to what is happening around us, for the deterioration of any one part of the planet affects us all" (CPPC 11). Elsewhere, Benedict XVI gave a more profound ecological reason why we have to care for the environment: "The earth has a dignity of its own"[14] that must be duly respected. Hence, for him, it is imperative to always bring these two reasons together dialectically.

In line with his predecessors, Benedict XVI also appropriated the top-down approach to change. As we pointed out, he relied on the capacity of world leaders at every level to achieve a sustainable and peaceful world. He placed his trust in the international community and individual governments, competent authorities, civil society groups, non-governmental organizations, and the media sector to cooperate "in countering harmful ways of treating the environment" (CV 50; CPPC 11). Interestingly, the poor are missing in his list of agents for change. Presumably, he knew very well that the poor comprise the majority of victims of oppression and the ecological crisis, as he himself pointed out that they "are excluded in many cases from the goods of creation destined for all."[15] Unfortunately, like the lacuna of any top-down approach to change, the active participation of the poor has been neglected.

Based on these two magisterial documents on ecology, it is clear that Benedict XVI, like John Paul II, recognizes both human dignity and the integrity of creation as inseparable ethical

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[14] Benedict XVI, "Address to the Bundestag," (Berlin, September 22, 2011); quoted in Mary Taylor, "A Deeper Ecology: A Catholic Vision of the Person in Nature," *Communio* 38 (Winter 2011): 583-620, 602.

[15] Benedict XVI, *The Human Family, A Community of Peace: Message for the 2008 World Day of Peace* (December 8, 2007), no. 7.

principles in responding to the ecological crisis. Apparently, there are no clear indications that both of them are willing to totally give up the Church's anthropocentric view on nature. Presumably, when there is tension between these two principles, the rule of thumb is to always prioritize human life (CV 51). In my view, this would lead to "people over nature" scenario which, when absolutized, may automatically sacrifice the welfare of non-human species for human interests.

A Critical Assessment of the Social Teaching on Stewardship

In the foregoing, we repeatedly pointed out the ambivalence of the CST's commitment to the stewardship model that is unduly anthropocentric. We also showed that the Magisterium, since 1971, is already "ecologically conscious", although its perspective on addressing the ecological crisis remains anthropocentric. In this section, let us briefly justify this assessment, first, by pointing out three indications of anthropocentrism in the CST's stewardship model. Then we will address the lacunae of the stewardship model by exploring the eschatological vision of creation in light of the coming of the Kingdom of God.

Anthropocentrism prioritizes attitudes, values, or practices that promote human interests, as opposed to the interests of non-human beings. There is no doubt that the CST's ecological framework maintains a certain degree of anthropocentrism. The first indication of this is shown in its tendency to give *more* emphasis on the uniqueness of human dignity *than* the integrity of creation. It underscores the distinction between human and non-human creatures, in effect blurring kinship between them. Consequently, humans hail themselves as "mysteriously different" from other earthly creatures. As the Church's Magisterium emphasized, "Only man and woman, among all creatures, were made by God 'in his own image'" (CSDC 451). This anthropological view distinguishes the human person as "the only creature on earth which God willed for its own sake" (CA 53), as though the non-human creatures are

not included in the divine plan of salvation. Furthermore, by affirming human beings as God-appointed stewards, CST tends to presume that the material universe mainly serve as the "setting" for human life (CV 48) and is given by God for the well-being of humanity, and the intrinsic value of non-human creatures has not been duly recognized.

Another indication of Catholic social teaching's anthropocentrism is its tendency to prioritize human ecology over natural ecology. In the face of the ecological crisis, the Magisterium maintains that the real issue or "the more urgent problem" is that the environment threatened by human being's self-destructive activities. John Paul II particularly worried about the trend that invests significant effort for the advancement of natural ecology, and yet "too little effort is made to safeguard the moral conditions for an authentic 'human ecology'" (CA 38). This clearly shows that John Paul II prioritizes human victims of ecological calamities, especially the poor who are vulnerable to catastrophes caused by "man's inhumanity to man" (PGC 1). This explains the priority he has given to human ecology, which has been criticized as an obstacle for CST's contribution to the burning discussion of environmental ethics.[16] Unfortunately, CST's commitment to human ecology seems to support the controversial view that the "care for human persons" and the "care for the natural environment" are two competing issues rather than as two sides of the same coin. Furthermore, this view contributes to the people-versus-nature perspective and prevents regarding human beings as part of and dependent on nature.

Finally, anthropocentrism in CST is also indicated in its rejection of the "egalitarian" model of relationship in favor of a hierarchical view of creation. To emphasize the superiority of human beings, the Magisterium magnified the biblical mandate that God put them "in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it" (Gen 2:15), thus presuming that human beings, as God-appointed

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[16] On this observation, see Brian Henning, "From Despot to Steward: The Greening of Catholic Social Teaching," in David Matzko McCarthy, ed., *The Heart of Catholic Social Teaching: Its Origins and Contemporary Significance* (Grand Rapid: Brazos Press, 2009), 183-93, 188.

stewards, have the vocation to exercise "dominion" over other creatures and to "subdue" the earth (Gen 1:26, 28). Moreover, in the New Testament, the Parable of the Talents (Matt 25:14-30; Lk 19:12-28) has been interpreted to confirm the role of human beings as stewards of their master's property that must be wisely traded until he comes. In any case, CST's notion of stewardship tends to eclipse the aspect of human beings' kinship with non-human creatures. Some theologians problematized that the notion of "stewardship" gives an impression of an "absent God and a reified earth."[17] In other words, the analogy of stewardship could be misinterpreted as promoting the view that non-human creatures are material properties to be managed by human beings. This sense of stewardship seems to contradict the Catholic belief of the perpetual presence of God in the world (Matt 28:20), and the biblical basis of the intrinsic value of nature as created "good" by God (Gen 1:1-25) prior to the creation of human beings.

Another noticeable lacuna of CST's stewardship model is its lack of eschatological vision for creation. I believe this is due to the fact that the Magisterium has not sufficiently developed the ecological perspective on the Kingdom of God (i.e., regnocentric perspective). The biblical notion of the Kingdom of God, which plays a central role in the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth (Mk 1:15; Matt 4:17; Lk 4:43), means the salvation of *all* creatures. Christians believe that the Kingdom of God is already partially present in history, but will be fully realized in the eschatological future. This faith allows us to recognize the normativity of God's kingdom, as it allows us to judge whether present realities are in harmony or in discord with that eschatological future.

In our desire to enrich the Catholic social teaching's stewardship model, I propose two significant theological innovations in light of the inclusive notion of the Kingdom of God. First, our faith in the Kingdom of God could be a resource for overcoming the limitations of the CST's anthropocentric response to the ecological crisis. As St. Paul affirmed, both human

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[17] On this view, see Seán McDonagh, *Passion for the Earth: The Christian Vocation to Promote Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1995), 130.

and non-human creatures eagerly hope for the full realization of salvation offered in Jesus Christ. (Rom 8:20-21). Second, our faith in God's Kingdom allows us to develop an eschatological vision of creation that gives us hope and perseverance in the face of an ecological crisis. As Christians, we firmly believe in the coming of "a new heaven and a new earth" (Isa 65:17-25, 66:22; 2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1-2), which is another image of the final realization of God's Kingdom. God has promised us to "recapitulate" the whole of creation under the headship of Christ at the end of time (Eph 1:9-10). With the loving embrace of the cosmic Christ and the indwelling Spirit, the whole creation hopefully returns to its final home in the bosom of the Trinity.

To reiterate, I argue that understanding the final destiny of creation in light of the eschatological vision of God's Kingdom has not been sufficiently developed in Catholic social teaching on ecology. To overcome this limitation, we have to retrieve the Christian faith in God's Kingdom that is thoroughly ecological to overcome the prevailing anthropocentric view of salvation. We realize that the life of human beings in the eschatological future is unimaginable if it is disconnected from the community of life that makes up the ecosystem. Thus, we have good reasons to believe that human beings' interrelationship and interconnectedness with nature in this present life will be fully preserved and actualized in the best possible way in God's Kingdom. Perhaps the significant difference, as the Prophet Isaiah foresaw it, is that the relationship in life everlasting will be a fully healed and a completely reconciled relationship enjoyed by the one family of creation:

> The wolf shall live with the lamb. The leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Is 11:6-9).

We can, therefore, say that a healthy relationship with non-human creation is a positive sign of the coming of God's Kingdom. We believe that the coming of God's Kingdom will fulfill rather than abolish the earthly ecological laws of relationship. Thus, it is hoped that, in God's Kingdom, there will be full recognition not only of the dignity of all human beings but also of the intrinsic value of all creatures. In this light, human beings should be seen as agents and stewards of the Kingdom of God. They need to embrace the ecological praxis that contributes to the renewal of God's creation.

SOME ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND ONGOING CHALLENGES

Our reading of current Catholic social teaching on ecology shows that the Magisterium respects both the dignity of human life and the integrity of creation. These inseparable principles serve as a theological framework and moral guidelines for making decisions. Hopefully, they can be made to produce "models of action" that respond to the challenges of ecological crisis. In fact, John Paul II strongly encouraged the people to support the "new ecological awareness" and to allow it "to develop into concrete programmes and initiatives" (PGC 1). To date, however, several theologians have critically observed that the present CST documents on ecology "do not offer concrete norms for action" or an explicit ecological ethics that we need for our time.[18] Building on this critical assessment, we track accomplishments of the Magisterium and other emerging social movements that respond to the challenges of the ecological crisis. This would allow us to discern the trend of people's ecological struggles both inside and outside the Church.

[18] On this critique, see Aloysius Cartagenas, "Catholic Development Ethics Forty Years after *Populorum Progressio*: Cross-Cultural Revisions and the Prospects of Global Solidarity," in *Hapág: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Theological Research* 5 (2008): 35-85, 67-68.

The "Greening" of Catholic Social Teaching

As we have pointed out, the post-Vatican II Catholic social teaching recognizes the urgency of the ecological crisis since 1971. This can be shown in Paul VI's *Octogesima adveniens* and the Synod of Bishops' *Justitia in mundo*, which criticize exploitative models of economic development and unjust systems that promote extreme social inequalities. Since then, Paul VI's social teaching has significantly included ecological issues in the context of global justice. John Paul II continued this legacy by consistently pushing the ecological issues as shown in his four encyclical letters: *Redemptor hominis* (1979), *Laborem exercens* (1981), *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (1987), and *Centesimus annus* (1991). Furthermore, among John Paul II's papal messages, his 1990 World Day of Peace obviously serves as his most comprehensive theological treatment of ecology. Many of his social teaching on ecology—which can be found in his encyclicals, letters, addresses, and messages—has been put together in the chapter on "Safeguarding the Environment" of the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (2004). Benedict XVI also appropriated the ecological advocacy in the encyclical *Caritas in veritate* (2009), which contains four sections on environmental concerns. Like his predecessor, Benedict XVI's papal message for the 2010 World Day of Peace was also devoted to the theme, *If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation.* All these clearly show the "greening" of Catholic social teaching.

Meanwhile, in the Philippines, there is a discernible explicit commitment to ecology that runs through the pastoral teachings of the local Magisterium. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) for its part issued four pastoral responses to the ecological crisis. The first was its 1988 pastoral letter *What is Happening to Our Beautiful Land,* which has been globally recognized as the first magisterial pastoral letter issued by an episcopal conference to focus on ecology. In 1998, the CBCP issued *A Statement of Concern on the Mining Act of 1995*, expressing its concern for the effects of mining operation both on the environment and the people, particularly the indigenous

peoples (IPs) and their ancestral domain. The third is a pastoral letter on ecology issued in 2005 with the title *Water is Life*, which addresses the critical environmental problem and the urgency to protect the remaining watersheds. Lastly, the CBCP issued another pastoral letter in 2008 on *Upholding the Sanctity of Life* that reaffirms its previous position on the issues of irresponsible mining, illegal logging operations, and the alarming phenomenon of global warming and climate change.

In addition to the foregoing CBCP documents on ecology, the local Magisterium in the Philippines also devoted a number of provisions in its *Second Plenary Council of the Philippines* (PCP-II) in 1991, which not only appropriates the notion of the integrity of creation, but also commits the Philippine Church to "set up an ecology desk in social action centers" and to "make ecology a special concern of the social action apostolate down to the parochial level" (PCP-II nos. 321-24; sec 4, art 31).[19] I think it is time to issue another pastoral letter on ecology that adequately responds to alarming environmental calamities associated with global warming.

ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM

The ecological struggle rooted in Christian faith is a common characteristic of environmental activism erupting in many developing countries. In the Philippines, for instance, the environmental activism that emerged in Mindanao in the 1980s started from the rural grassroots of the remote San Fernando Parish (Bukidnon). In 1987, the poor parishioners staged their series of picket against logging operations, which greedily exploited their remaining forests.[20] This pioneering environmental protest eventually grew into a diocese-wide ecological advocacy, which successfully pressured the national

[19] Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP-II), *Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines*, 20 January-17 February 1991 (Manila: Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, 1992).

[20] On this account, see Karl Gaspar, *A People's Option: To Struggle for Creation* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1990), 34.

government to put the whole province of Bukidnon under a logging moratorium in 1990. To effectively implement this policy, the government deputized Catholic priests in Bukidnon as foresters. This church-led ecological struggle culminated on October 14, 1991 with the martyrdom of a Bukidnon priest, Nery Lito Satur.[21] Fr. Satur's heroic death inflamed the people's commitment to care for God's creation and served as watershed for the church's ongoing ecological struggle. Thanks to the pioneering grassroots movements, we have come to realize that ecological struggle is an urgent sign of the time and an essential part of Christian witnessing.

Right now, the trend of ecological advocacy in the Philippines has shifted to mining issues. It has been proposed that mining is an ecologically dangerous activity in the "island ecosystem" of the Philippines. Furthermore, being home to many indigenous peoples (IPs), mining operations in the country would not only displace many of the indigenous peoples' communities but also desecrate their ancestral places of worship. With the advent of climate change, the adverse effects of mining operations would aggravate catastrophic landslides, flash floods, soil erosions, and other soil-related calamities. It is edifying to hear church leaders who dialogue with the government to stop large-scale mining, which destroys the natural environment and people's livelihoods, especially of poor farmers and indigenous peoples. This inspiring ecological advocacy deserves our full support for the sake of the greater common good that embraces both human and non-human creatures.

CONSERVATION MOVEMENTS

The conservation movements that first occurred in developed countries have significantly contributed to the global ecological consciousness. It is well known that the rich nations from the northern hemisphere, together with their Green advocates and respective political parties, were the first ones to

[21] See Gaudencio Rosales, *Fr. Neri Satur and the Church He Died For* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1997).

sound the alarm of ecological threats, which eventually gave rise to various movements of conservationism and environmentalism.[22] The conservation biologists and ecologists from the Global North have also pioneered the ongoing analysis of the ecological threats brought about by the destruction of the ecosystems and the extinction of species. Their ecological analysis has prompted the industrialized nations of the North to focus, though not exclusively, on conserving and preserving the environment. In effect, our generation has become enthusiastic in supporting global conservation efforts of endangered species and the preservation of national parks and exclusive zones with rich biodiversity.

One strong characteristic of the global conservation movement is the strengthening of environmental resource management by active participation in saving rivers, forests, whales, tigers, eagles, and other endangered species. The developed nations in the Global North are known for passing laws that legalize placing fortresses or fences around protected areas and deploy special guards to protect nature from every possibility of negative human influence. To a certain extent, this ecological practice has been replicated in many developing countries. As we have shown, even the present CST on ecology tends to support conservation movements in view of preserving nature for the sake of the future generations.

A SUSTAINABLE WORLD

In the face of the ecological crisis, the developed countries in the Global North would like to maintain their march towards further economic growth. Their main problem is how to conserve the environment without sacrificing their pursuit for continued economic development. Fortunately, this puzzle has found a theoretical solution in the concept of "sustainable development," which was popularized by the World Commission

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[22] See Donella Meadows, Jorgen Randers, and Dennis Meadows, et al., *The Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on The Predicament of Mankind* (New York: Universe Books, 1972).

on Environment and Development (also known as the Brundtland Report) in 1987. As this expression suggests, a "development" is sustainable if it "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."[23] Although it is a very attractive concept, some critics maintain that it still remains to be verified if this is possible in the prevailing neoliberal model of economic development.

It should be noted that sustainable development primarily seeks to explain the mutually affecting problems of poverty and ecological crisis. Oftentimes this expression has been interpreted simply as *integrating* the environmental considerations into any economic development procedures. The *Report* presupposes that, by accelerating the process of development, the problems of poverty and the ecological crisis would also be solved. This view was adopted in the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro and in the Millennium Development Goals in 2000. It is hoped that the CST must not remain uncritical to the hidden agenda of this model of development.

In response to the agenda of sustainable development, some scientists from the affluent Global North argue that our generation has already "gone much too far" so that what we really need now is "sustainable retreat from the mess that we're now in."[24] Along this line, the *Earth Charter*, which was officially launched in 2000, tried to nuance this critical position by proposing a "sustainable lifestyle." Accordingly, a lifestyle is sustainable when it "allows Earth, with its beauty and integrity and its abundant but limited resources, to meet the current needs of all humankind in a way that will allow Earth to reproduce itself, to regenerate itself, and to continue its evolution as it has done for four and a half billion years."[25] In contrast to

[23] See World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), *Our Common Future* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 43.

[24] See Lovelock, James Lovelock, *The Revenge of Gaia: Why the Earth is Fighting Back–and How We Can Still Save Humanity* (London: Penguin Books: 2006), 8.

[25] Leonardo Boff, "Respect and Care for the Community of Life with Understanding, Compassion, and Love," in., *The Earth Charter in Action: Toward*

"sustainable development," the main idea of "sustainable lifestyle" is not simply to conserve nature or to allow it to recover so that we can resume plundering it again and to meet the demands of the dominant model of development. Accordingly, that ecological interest is not liberating to nature. Rather, what needs to be done is to liberate the Earth from the type of development paradigm that incurably plunders the natural resources. I think the latter is closely related with John Paul II's call for "ecological conversion." This idea is worth pursuing in Catholic social teaching.

CONCLUSION

The ecological crisis can no longer be ignored today. It is affecting all areas of human life. It is sad to say, however, that the stewardship model of caring for God's creation, which prevails in the CST documents on ecology, promotes an anthropocentric perspective on ecological crisis. This bias for human interest has hindered the magisterium to adequately develop the principle of the integrity of creation. Furthermore, the stewardship model endorsed by the CST has not sufficiently developed the eschatological dimension of creation theology. To overcome both lacunae, we have proposed to understand the ecological crisis in light of the inclusive and non-anthropocentric notion of God's kingdom. It allowed us to look at human beings as stewards of God's kingdom.

In the face of the rampant ecological disasters, we should do more than just doing humanitarian charity to the victims. I believe it is not enough for us to become Good Samaritans to the suffering creation; we are also challenged to serve as God's militant prophets who work for justice in view of preventing the same ecological tragedies from happening again in the future. We cannot simply tolerate and adapt what we religiously consider as a deviation from God's plan for creation and as a denial to the historic realization of God's Kingdom.

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a Sustainable World, ed. Peter Blaze Corcoran (Amsterdam: KIT Publishers, 2005), 43-46, 44.

Reynaldo D. Raluto
St. John Vianney Theological Seminary
Cagayan de Oro City, Mindanao, Philippines
Email: reyraluto@yahoo.com