

Environmental Concerns and the Dignity and Inviolability of the Human Person

Introduction

The tradition of Catholic social teaching offers a developing and distinctive perspective on environmental issues. That tradition rests upon the Church's foundational doctrines concerning God the creator, man created by God in His image, and the rest of the created order. They are these:

What is man that you are mindful of him?¹

1. Creation as a whole discloses to man the certainties a) that God exists, b) that God created all that is, and c) that the ultimate purpose and meaning of creation is to be found in the nature of God Himself.²
2. Man is made in the image and likeness of God (*imago Dei*)³
3. God created everything for man, but man in turn was created to serve and love God and to offer all creation back to him.⁴
4. Man is given dominion over the animals and over the earth, but that relationship of dominion is to be characterised by solidarity and benevolence as well as control.⁵
5. Man is made as male and female. They complement each other in friendship and love. And they become one flesh as they share their conjugal love.⁶ Through that love they are to "be fruitful and multiply"⁷. In obedience to that command Adam and Eve had two sons, Cain and Abel.⁸
6. The relationship between human beings is to be governed by mutual love and respect (from which virtues we must behave justly, and more than justly⁹). Homicide (ie the killings of the innocent) is everywhere condemned. Cain is condemned for killing his brother, Abel. But God also forbids the retributive killing of Cain, guilty and all as he is of fratricide.¹⁰
7. After Abel's murder, Adam and Eve had another son, Seth, whom Eve believed was appointed by God as a replacement for Abel.¹¹
8. After Seth, Adam and Eve went on to have more children, sons and daughters.¹²

¹ Psalm 8:4

² Cf *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), 46

³ Genesis 1:26

⁴ Cf CCC, 358

⁵ Cf CCC, 358

⁶ Genesis 2:23-24

⁷ Genesis 1:28

⁸ Cf also CCC, 372

⁹ Matthew 5:40

¹⁰ Genesis 4:8-16

¹¹ Genesis 4:25. "Later on, after Adam had sexual relations with his wife, she gave birth to a son and named him Seth, because "God granted me another offspring to replace Abel, since Cain murdered him."

¹² Genesis 5:4. "Adam lived another 800 years, fathering other sons and daughters after he had fathered Seth."

The relationship of man to animals and plants

9. Since human beings are made in the image and likeness of God they have rights and responsibilities.
10. Animals too are made out of the dust of the ground¹³ and are also described as “living creatures”¹⁴.
11. Animals are seen as friends and helpers of human beings¹⁵, and are also called to “be fruitful and multiply”¹⁶. So there is solidarity between human beings and animals. Man has stewardship over the animals because he is authorised to name them.¹⁷
12. God saw all that he had made and saw it as good.¹⁸
13. The creation is always seen as an object for which God is to be praised. “O Lord how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.”¹⁹
14. This solidarity with animals (living beings) is specified in the Ten Commandments, where the Sabbath rest extends to “your cattle”.²⁰ In the book of Deuteronomy this is further specified thus: “you shall not do any work...or your ox, or your ass, or any of your cattle.”²¹.
15. After the Fall, the relationship between humans, between humans and animals, and humans and plants becomes less certain. Wild animals attack, droughts occur, and crops fail. The Old Testament provides a base line compromise with how human beings are to get on. After the flood they are given permission to eat animals but must not consume blood because to do so would be to disrespect life.²²
16. The Old Testament approach to animals is summed up in Proverbs 12: 10: “A righteous man has regard for the life of his beast, but the mercy of the wicked is cruel”.
17. Where care for the land is concerned, there is a requirement that the land be left fallow after six years and not cultivated in the seventh year. Here, the land is left to recover, what grows naturally being left to the poor and to wild animals. This looks like an ecological rule to help the land recover from its “work” while at the same time giving free reign to the poor²³. Wild animals are not forgotten, they too are seen as living beings for whom human beings should have a care, despite the dangers to human beings from those animals.

In summary, then, we believe that the following themes drawn from this tradition are integral dimensions of ecological responsibility:

¹³ Genesis 2:19

¹⁴ Genesis 2:19

¹⁵ Genesis 2:18

¹⁶ Genesis 1:22

¹⁷ Genesis 2:19-20

¹⁸ Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25

¹⁹ Psalm 104:24

²⁰ Exodus 20:10

²¹ Deuteronomy 5:14

²² Genesis 9:3-5

²³ For obligations to the poor in the stewardship of the created order see also Leviticus 19: 9-10; Deuteronomy 23: 24-25; 24: 19-22

- a God-centred and sacramental²⁴ view of the universe, which grounds human accountability for the fate of the earth;
- consistent respect for human life, which extends to respect for all creation;
- world view affirming the ethical significance of global interdependence and the common good;
- an ethics of solidarity promoting cooperation and a just structure of sharing in the world community;
- an understanding of the universal purpose of created things, which requires equitable use of the earth's resources;
- an option for the poor²⁵, which gives passion to the quest for an equitable and sustainable world;
- a conception of authentic development, which offers a direction for progress that respects human dignity and the limits of material growth.²⁶

“Sustainable world”

Sustainability refers to the ability or capacity of something to maintain itself or to sustain itself well into the future. In the context of discussions on the environment, it refers to the good things which human beings need to live, how these goods are to be obtained in ways that do not threaten subsequent generations’ right to access these goods. It is simply the description of the goal to be achieved. By itself the goal does not instruct human beings as to what morally appropriate measures may be undertaken to achieve that goal.

Within the Catholic moral tradition, the term “sustainable world” is not used in such a way that would suggest human existence on earth is man’s ultimate end. This is because man’s end is to know God and to love Him, and to be able to enjoy his presence for eternity.

The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for: the dignity of man rests above all on the fact that he is called to communion with God. This invitation to converse with God is

²⁴ “A thing may be called a “sacrament,” either from having a certain hidden sanctity, and in this sense a sacrament is a “sacred secret”; or from having some relationship to this sanctity, which relationship may be that of a cause, or of a sign or of any other relation.” STh III, q. 60, a. 1

²⁵ *Centesimus annus*, n. 57: “Today more than ever, the Church is aware that her social message will gain credibility more immediately from the witness of actions than as a result of its internal logic and consistency. This awareness is also a source of her preferential option for the poor, which is never exclusive or discriminatory towards other groups. This option is not limited to material poverty, since it is well known that there are many other forms of poverty, especially in modern society—not only economic but cultural and spiritual poverty as well. The Church’s love for the poor, which is essential for her and a part of her constant tradition, impels her to give attention to a world in which poverty is threatening to assume massive proportions in spite of technological and economic progress. In the countries of the West, different forms of poverty are being experienced by groups which live on the margins of society, by the elderly and the sick, by the victims of consumerism, and even more immediately by so many refugees and migrants. In the developing countries, tragic crises loom on the horizon unless internationally coordinated measures are taken before it is too late.”

²⁶ United States Catholic Conference, *Catholic Social Teaching and Environmental Ethics*, <http://www.webofcreation.org/DenominationalStatements/catholic.htm>

addressed to man as soon as he comes into being. For if man exists it is because God has created him through love, and through love continues to hold him in existence. He cannot live fully according to truth unless he freely acknowledges that love and entrusts himself to his creator.²⁷

Immoral policies designed to achieve “sustainability”, such as abortion, infanticide, contraception and the like, destroy our friendship with God and rule out our final and eternal destiny.

Development of Catholic Doctrine

In our time there are some persons who wrongly use the principle of “development of doctrine” to mean that the Church can change her dogmatic teaching in the light of developments in science and society, so that what was once true becomes now substantially untrue. Some of the same words may be used, but they are filled with a different content, content at odds with their original meaning. The origin of the principle of the “development of doctrine” may be found in the writings of St Vincent Lérins in the 5th century AD who said this:

Therefore, let there be growth and abundant progress in understanding, knowledge, and wisdom, in each and all, in individuals and in the whole Church, at all times and in the progress of ages, but only with the proper limits, i.e., within the same dogma, the same meaning, the same judgment [eodem sensu eademque sententia].²⁸

In other words, a development in doctrine is valid only when it takes place within the boundaries of the doctrine itself. It cannot and must not conclude or affirm the contrary of the original teaching. Saint Vincent then makes a crucial distinction between “progress” and “change”, a distinction which seems to have been lost on many key figures in current debates within the Catholic Church.

But it [progress of religion] must be such as may be truly a progress of the faith, not a change; for when each several thing is improved in itself, that is progress; but when a thing is turned out of one thing into another, that is change.²⁹

This teaching of Saint Vincent Lérins was affirmed by the First Vatican Council (1869-1870).³⁰ And on the 11th of October 1962 Pope St. John XXIII also appealed to it in his opening address at the Second Vatican Council.³¹

²⁷ CCC, n. 27

²⁸ *Commonitorium primum*, chapter 23, n. 54. <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3506.htm>

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Dei filius, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith*, chapter 4, “Faith and Reason”. For, the doctrine of faith which God revealed has not been handed down as a philosophic invention to the human mind to be perfected, but has been entrusted as a divine deposit to the Spouse of Christ, to be faithfully guarded and infallibly interpreted. Hence, also, that understanding of its sacred dogmas must be perpetually retained, which Holy Mother Church has once declared; and there must never be recession from that meaning under the specious name of a deeper understanding “Therefore [...] let the understanding, the knowledge, and

There can be no authentic development in Catholic doctrine where the proposed formulation concludes or affirms a position contrary to the truth of its basic principles.

Marriage and the Family – the heart of civilisation

At the heart of Catholic social teaching on environmental issues is the good of the family based upon the union of a man and a woman in marriage. This is because the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society. Families have formed societies in order that societies can serve families. Put another way, the State exists to serve families³².

The environmental challenges that confront humanity are, apart from natural causes, often the result of human acts and omissions. The solutions suggested in influential quarters centre around the idea that the human population on earth is excessive, is a cause in itself for environmental degradation, and that a reduction in population is not only desirable but necessary. Advocate for population control, Jeffrey Sachs, puts it this way:

Higher energy use is already changing the world's climate in dangerous ways. Furthermore, the strains of increased global populations, combined with income growth, are leading to rapid deforestation, depletion of fisheries, land degradation, and the loss of habitat and extinction of a vast number of animal and plant species.

Population growth in developing regions - especially Africa, India, and other parts of Asia - needs to slow. Public policies can play an important role by extending access to family planning services to the poor, expanding social security systems, reducing child mortality through public health investments, and improving education and job opportunities for women.³³

By contrast, St John Paul II said this:

In defense of the human person, **the church stands opposed to the imposition of limits on family size and to the promotion of methods of limiting births which separate the unitive and procreative dimensions of marital intercourse, which are contrary to the moral law inscribed on the human heart or which constitute an assault on the sacredness of life.** Thus sterilization, which is more and more promoted as a

wisdom of individuals as of all, of one man as of the whole Church, grow and progress strongly with the passage of the ages and the centuries; but let it be solely in its own genus, namely in the same dogma, with the same sense and the same understanding." [Vincent of Lerins, *Commonitorium*, 23, 3]."

³¹ *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*. "The deposit or the truths of faith, contained in our sacred teaching, are one thing, while the mode in which they are enunciated, keeping the same meaning and the same judgment [eodem sensu eademque sententia], is another."

³² Pope John Paul II describes the teaching of Pope Leo XIII: "On the contrary, he frequently insists on necessary limits to the State's intervention and on its instrumental character, inasmuch as the individual, the family and society are prior to the State, and inasmuch as the State exists in order to protect their rights and not stifle them." Cf *Centesimus annus*, n. 11, and Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, nn. 101f.; 104f.; 130f.; 136.

³³ Jeffrey Sachs, *The Case for Slowing Population Growth*, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/the-case-for-slowing-population-growth>

method of family planning, because of its finality and its potential for the violation of human rights, especially of women, is clearly unacceptable; it poses a most grave threat to human dignity and liberty when promoted as part of a population policy. Abortion, which destroys existing human life, is a heinous evil, and it is never an acceptable method of family planning, as was recognized by consensus at the Mexico City U.N. International Conference on Population (1984).³⁴ [Emphasis added]

Thirteen years later, Saint John Paul II directed our attention to the issues that are fundamental to understanding the moral position adopted by the population controllers.

Today we often witness the taking of opposite and exaggerated positions: on the one hand, in the name of the exhaustibility and insufficiency of environmental resources, demands are made to limit the birth rate, especially among the poor and developing peoples. On the other, in the name of an idea inspired by egocentrism and biocentrism it is being proposed that the ontological and axiological difference between men and other living beings be eliminated, since the biosphere is considered a biotic unity of indifferentiated value. Thus man's superior responsibility can be eliminated in favour of an egalitarian consideration of the "dignity" of all living beings.

But the balance of the ecosystem and the defence of the healthiness of the environment really need human responsibility and a responsibility that must be open to new forms of solidarity. An open and comprehensive solidarity with all men and all peoples is essential, founded on respect for life and the promotion of sufficient resources for the poorest and for future generations.³⁵ [Emphasis added]

The Catholic Church is sensitive to the urgent need to protect the environment because the creation is a gift from God and because human beings have been given the responsibility of doing everything scientifically and morally possible to be good stewards of this gift. The Church does not take a one-sided view of environmental issues, and nor does she adopt a utilitarian approach to the solutions to environmental degradation. One must not only achieve a good end, but one must do it by not violating other goods, such as the goods of natural marriage, procreation, and the family.

³⁴ Talk given during a March 18 1994 meeting at the Vatican with Nafis Sadik, executive director of the U.N. Fund for Population Activities. The Pope criticizes a final draft document prepared for the September U.N. International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, Egypt.

³⁵ Pope John Paul II, *Address to Conference on Environment and Health*, 24 March 1997, n. 5

Saint John Paul II put it this way:

The balance of the ecosystem and the defence of the healthiness of the environment really need human responsibility and a responsibility that must be open to new forms of solidarity.³⁶

There is a keen desire on the part of the Catholic Church to support all measures necessary to protect and enhance the natural environment, an environment in which mankind's role is to act as good stewards of this wonderful gift of creation. That desire is qualified by the injunction that we must never do evil to achieve good.

From the moral point of view contraception and abortion are specifically different evils. The former contradicts the full truth of the sexual act as the proper expression of conjugal love, while the latter destroys the life of a human being; the former is opposed to the virtue of chastity in marriage, the latter is opposed to the virtue of justice and directly violates the divine commandment "You shall not kill"³⁷.

In fact, "abortion and infanticide are abominable crimes"³⁸.

Secularist approaches to environmental sustainability

Professor Jeffrey D. Sachs is Special Advisor to the Secretary-General on the *Millennium Development Goals*, and Director of *The UN Millennium Project*. Professor Sachs presents the case for population control in a moderate and appealing way. That case may be summed up in these terms:

1. World population growth is rising at such a rate that it will put unsustainable stresses on the resources of the planet.
2. Adding another 2.5 billion people to the planet will have catastrophic global consequences in terms of soaring rates of energy use which contribute to unsustainably greater levels of greenhouse gas emissions and to global warming.
3. Reducing population growth is an essential component (along with other measures) to meeting the challenge of global warming, mass starvation, "rapid deforestation, depletion of fisheries, land degradation, and the loss of habitat and extinction of a vast number of animal and plant species."³⁹
4. Accordingly "population growth in developing regions – especially Africa, India, and other parts of Asia - needs to slow. Public policies can play an important role by extending access to family planning services to the poor, expanding social security systems, reducing child mortality through public health investments, and improving education and job opportunities for women."⁴⁰

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, n. 13

³⁸ *Gaudium et spes*, n. 51 §3

³⁹ Jeffrey D Sachs, *The case for slowing population growth*, 2004, <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/the-case-for-slowing-population-growth>

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

5. Dr Sachs concludes by setting out the advantages to human society and to the wider natural environment if population growth could be significantly slowed.

In his *UN Millennium Project Report to the UN Secretary-General*, the Director again emphasised the links between population, poverty and environmental degradation.

But how is the slowing of population growth to be achieved? The answer being advocated by Dr Sachs and other population controllers is this: greater provision for “gender equality” measures which “include interventions for sexual and reproductive health, access to property rights and work, security, participation and institutional reform, and data collection and monitoring.”⁴¹

Dr Sachs further specifies what he means by “gender equality” in these terms:

Universal access to sexual and reproductive health information and services and protection of reproductive rights. (Service packages described under health interventions above.) Legislation and awareness campaigns to protect the rights of individuals and couples to plan their families; to ensure access to sexual and reproductive health information and services; to discourage early marriage (at ages posing health risks), female genital mutilation, and other traditional harmful practices; and to expand access to safe abortions (where permitted by law) and review the legal status of abortion in order to improve public health while respecting national sovereignty, cultural values, and diversity

So the greater availability of contraception and “safe” abortion are key elements of gender equality, and “sexual and reproductive health”.

The United Nations convened a *Conference on Sustainable Development* held from the 20th to the 22nd of June 2012 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. “One of the main outcomes of the Rio+20 Conference was the agreement by member States to launch a process to develop a set of *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs), which will build upon the *Millennium Development Goals* and converge with the post 2015 development agenda. It was decided to establish an “inclusive and transparent intergovernmental process open to all stakeholders, with a view to developing global sustainable development goals to be agreed by the General Assembly”⁴².

The goals of the *Sustainable Development* programme maintained similar goals to its immediate predecessor, the *Millennium Development Goals*. Among the 17 *Sustainable Development Goals* we find two references to the population control agenda in goals number three and number five.⁴³

⁴¹ <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/documents/MainReportComplete-lowres.pdf>

⁴² <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics/sustainabledevelopmentgoals>

⁴³ At the time of writing there are currently three draft sets of sustainable development goals however the Open Working Group (OWG) draft set of 17 goals is the most likely one to be developed when negotiations continue in June 2015.

Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages⁴⁴

The targets for goal 3 include the following:

3.7 by 2030 ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes⁴⁵

Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls⁴⁶

Gender equality, as already pointed out involves “sexual and reproductive health information and services and protection of reproductive rights”, that is abortion and contraception.

The targets for goal 5 include the following:

5.6 ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the ICPD and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences

The meaning of gender equality

There has been discussion and not a little confusion in the minds of many about just what the term “gender equality” really involves. It should be noted that the reference to diversity in the Sachs explanation of Gender Equality denotes the LGBT agenda. And as shown above, it is also clearly code for the widespread promotion and acceptance of contraception, “safe” abortion and sterilisation.

In March 2010 the U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton clarified the issue thus:

If we’re talking about maternal health, you cannot have maternal health without reproductive health. **And reproductive health includes contraception and family planning and access to legal, safe abortion.** [Emphasis added]⁴⁷

And “reproductive health” is related to “gender equality” which in turn involves what Sachs has described as “universal access to sexual and reproductive health information and services and protection of reproductive rights.”

Catholics beware!

Engagement in the political process is a social and civic duty. But it must proceed on a morally sound basis. That means that Catholics must be “wise as serpents and innocent as

⁴⁴ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/focussdgs.html>

⁴⁵ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/focussdgs.html>

⁴⁶ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/focussdgs.html>

⁴⁷ <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/h/hillarycli412151.html> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UH9rC0MaBJc>

doves.”⁴⁸ They must also be vigilant to discern when they are coming up against “false prophets, who come in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.”⁴⁹ Especially in the areas of threats to human life, we see the ubiquitous presence of urbane politically savvy experts, who hide their real agenda through the use of euphemisms. In this way they seek to seduce Catholics to naively accept what they have to say on face value.

We have already seen what the population controllers mean when they use terms such as “gender equality”, “reproductive rights”, and “sexual and reproductive health”. These terms are code for abortion, contraception and sterilisation.

A recent example of this is the recent interview of Archbishop Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo, Chancellor of the *Pontifical Academies of Science and Social Sciences*, which hosted the “Protect the Earth, Dignify Humanity” conference at the Vatican in April 2015 in which Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, and his adviser Jeffrey D Sachs, were invited to participate.

Q. Undoubtedly, you discussed Ban Ki-moon’s and Jeffrey Sachs’ position on abortion and population control in the lead up to the conference. How were any questions resolved?

S.S. Yes. We had these discussions, and as you can see, **the draft SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) don’t even mention abortion or population control. They speak of access to family planning and sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights.** The interpretation and application of these depends on governments. Some may even interpret it as Paul VI, in terms of responsible paternity and maternity. Instead of attacking us, why not enter into dialogue with these “demons” to maybe make the formulation better, like we did on the issues of social inclusion and new forms of slavery?⁵⁰ [Emphasis added]

Such culpable naivety conspires to undermine, in a consistent way, application of magisterial teaching on population control, the environment, and essential elements of international human rights law. Here Church officials are seduced by accepting at face value seemingly innocuous language, but language which is used to promote destructive and morally bankrupt policies. How hard is it to read the real intentions of those who promote this language? They are open about what they really mean as has already been explained above. They mean that population growth should be curtailed, and that it should be curtailed by embracing policies which promote abortion, contraception, and sterilisation and which may even, in some circumstances be forcibly imposed.

Saint John Paul II, in his Encyclical *Evangelium vitae*, spelled out the internal incoherency of these policies and their manifest dangers which, while purporting to uphold the *Universal*

⁴⁸ Matthew 10:16

⁴⁹ Matthew 7:15

⁵⁰ https://c-fam.org/turtle_bay/vatican-prelate-blasts-critics-of-climate-conference/

Declaration of Human Rights (and related instruments), at the same time promote solutions to global problems which continue to devalue and destroy human lives.

A society lacks solid foundations when, on the one hand, it asserts values such as the dignity of the person, justice and peace, but then, on the other hand, radically acts to the contrary by allowing or tolerating a variety of ways in which human life is devalued and violated, especially where it is weak or marginalized. Only respect for life can be the foundation and guarantee of the most precious and essential goods of society... [EV 101]

The way forward

The family, based upon natural marriage is the fundamental group unit of society, the original social unit upon which the state relies. Man, made in the image of God, has been given the responsibility to look after the environment and to discern all morally sound ways to either prevent or repair environmental degradation.

Catholic social teaching provides both the basis and the ways to meet environmental crises caused by man's inhumanity to man, greed, carelessness, and indifference. Once these moral foundations are accepted, solutions to problems become more obvious. But we also must strive against the worst aspects of our fallen human nature. Confronted by major socio-moral problems of our own creating, the temptation is to find "easy" solutions, cruel solutions, solutions of the kind that got us into the mess in the first place. These kinds of solutions to man-made problems, in turn, create a raft of new problems which will further coarsen and degrade our moral sensibilities.