

HABITS OF PRESENCE
AND THE GENEROSITY OF CREATION:
ECOLOGY IN LIGHT OF INTEGRAL
HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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“Realization of a true ecology demands . . . the genuine ‘presencing’ of beings to each other, even as this presencing demands recognition of a giftedness, hence generosity, inherent in beings—indeed, in all beings.”



Integral human development sets the context within which alone an adequate approach to ecology can be conceived. In what follows, I will focus on the key principles of this proposal in terms of the habits of presence demanded by the generosity inherent in creation.

The term ecology, as is well-known, comes from the Greek *oikos*, meaning household, a term which continues to provide a key, by way of analogy, to any adequate reading of ecology. Ecology is defined as the science concerned with the inter-relationship, or total patterns of relations, between organisms and their environment. My task is to consider the root meaning of a true ecology, one in which organisms—both human and nonhuman living beings, and indeed all cosmological entities—exist

with integrity, in themselves and in relation to others and ultimately to God. Following two preliminary remarks introducing the key ideas in the first section, I will lay out in the second section the fundamental principles necessary for a right understanding of ecology, before concluding with an analysis of the roots of the problems facing our culture today.

1. PRELIMINARY REMARKS

1.1. *Ecology and integral human development*

“Integral human development” is rightly called the central principle of Catholic social teaching, from *Populorum progressio*¹ through *Sollicitudo rei socialis*² and *Caritas in veritate*,³ and now taken up by Pope Francis in *Evangelii gaudium* and especially *Laudato si’*. It is not hard to see the intrinsic link between integral human development and ecology. Pope Francis, following Paul VI, says that integral development concerns all human beings and the whole human being.⁴ According to Francis, this principle—the principle of universality—is intrinsic to the Gospel, which involves the salvation of every man and woman and includes “gathering up all things in Christ, things in heaven and on earth” (Eph 1:10; cf. *EG*, 181).⁵ In his World Day of Peace Message of 2014, Francis in-

1. Paul VI, *Populorum progressio*.

2. John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*.

3. Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate* (hereafter cited as *CIV*).

4. Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, 181 (hereafter cited as *EG*).

5. Cf. *Laudato si’*, 99–100 (hereafter cited as *LS*): “In the Christian understanding of the world, the destiny of all creation is bound up with the mystery of Christ, present from the beginning: ‘All things have been created through him and for him.’ . . .

‘For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.’ This leads us to direct our gaze to the end of time, when the Son will deliver all things to the Father, so that ‘God may be everything to every one.’ Thus, the creatures of this world no longer appear to us under merely natural guise because the risen One is mysteriously holding

dicates the link between human ecology and the integrity of creation and nature:

The human family has received from the Creator a common gift: nature. The Christian view of creation includes a positive judgment about the legitimacy of interventions on nature if these are meant to be beneficial and are performed responsibly, that is to say, by acknowledging the “grammar” inscribed in nature and by wisely using resources for the benefit of all, with respect for the beauty, finality, and usefulness of every living being and its place in the ecosystem. Nature, in a word, is at our disposition and we are called to exercise a responsible stewardship over it. Yet so often we are driven by greed and by the arrogance of dominion, possession, manipulation, and exploitation; we do not preserve nature; nor do we respect it or consider it a gracious gift which we must care for and set at the service of our brothers and sisters, including future generations.⁶

An ecology realized within integral human development, in a word, is realized within the depth and breadth of the Christian understanding of creation and redemption—of the primacy of God as Creator and Redeemer.

1.2. Habits of presence and the generosity of creation

Christianity contributes uniquely to ecology by forming human beings in what may be called “habits of presence.”⁷ Forming such habits is the responsibility of every human being, and in a significant sense of every human institution. However, only the Church—as the sacrament of Jesus Christ—bears in the end the capacity for realizing the full reality of presence.

The term presence comes from the Latin *praesentia*: to

them to himself and directing them towards fullness as their end.”

6. Francis, “Fraternity, the Foundation and Pathway to Peace” (Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace, January 1, 2014), 9.

7. I am grateful to Ruth Ashfield for the term “habits of presence,” developed in her lecture “Whom Do You Trust with Your Life? Suffering and Desperation Care,” delivered at the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family at The Catholic University of America, April 18, 2015.

be at hand, to be before (someone or something). The related Latin verb *praesentare* means “to place before or show,” and also “to give as a gift” or “bestow.” Realization of a true ecology demands, as its informing *conditio sine qua non*, the genuine “presencing” of beings to each other, even as this presencing demands recognition of a giftedness, hence generosity, inherent in beings—indeed, in *all* beings (in an analogical sense to be indicated below). An adequate ecology, in other words, presupposes a capacity in beings for relating to each other first in terms of a generous and so far liberating presence of each to the other, rather than in terms of a tendency to destroy or manipulate or distort.

How are we to understand the claim of an original generosity in beings, such that we can speak reasonably of an integrated human and natural ecological community? In light of this original generosity, what accounts for the obvious fact of the vast breakdown of community, and thus the lack of generosity in beings? Finally, what is the proper place of use or instrumentalization in the relations among beings? Under what conditions can use be legitimately said to extend or deepen, rather than distort or undermine, a presence that is meant to be generous?

2. FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

2.1. *The goodness of creation*

Every being is good because it is created. To be created is to be loved into existence by God.⁸ Every creature is thus good in itself, both because it is loved by God and because, as a participant in this love of God for it, each creature also loves itself. Because all creatures share in this common love of God for all of them and each of them, all creatures are primitively constituted

8. “The universe did not emerge as the result of arbitrary omnipotence, a show of force or a desire for self-assertion. Creation is of the order of love. God’s love is the fundamental moving force in all created things: ‘For you love all things that exist, and detest none of the things that you have made; for you would not have made anything if you had hated it.’ Every creature is thus the object of the Father’s tenderness, who gives it its place in the world” (*LS*, 77).

as a community.⁹ Each being, in a principled albeit proportionate (analogical) way, is in its root meaning a gift.¹⁰

2.2. Presence

Creation is a gratuitous act. God acts not out of need, but for the sake of those he creates. Creatures share *by virtue of their very existence (esse)* in this gratuitousness of God. It is this gratuitousness that establishes beings as good *in themselves*. As Joseph Ratzinger puts it in an early book, creatures are good and true in their original givenness *qua* being (*bonum et verum qua ens*).¹¹ This is the authentic view of Christianity, which prevailed through the pre-modern period. It is the view expressed by Thomas Aquinas in his “transcendental” understanding of being as inherently true and good (and beautiful). It is the ground for affirming the principle of an original giftedness and generosity among all creatures.¹²

The notion that the truth and goodness of things are first given demands from the human being what is the primarily contemplative act of “letting be.”¹³ It is this primary act of letting be that establishes the genuine presence of one being to others. This

9. “For they are yours, O Lord, who love the living.’ This is the basis of our conviction that, as part of the universe, called into being by one Father, all of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family” (LS, 89).

10. “[C]reation can only be understood as a gift from the outstretched hand of the Father of all, and as a reality illuminated by the love which calls us together into universal communion” (LS, 76).

11. Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 39–81.

12. “[W]e are called to recognize that . . . ‘by their mere existence [creatures] bless [God] and give him glory,’ and indeed, ‘the Lord rejoices in all his works.’ . . . [W]here other creatures are concerned, ‘we can speak of the priority of being over that of being useful.’ . . . ‘Each creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection. . . . Each of the various creatures, willed in its own being, reflects in its own way a ray of God’s infinite wisdom and goodness. Man must therefore respect the particular goodness of every creature, to avoid any disordered use of things’” (LS, 69).

13. See Robert Spaemann, “Nature,” in *A Robert Spaemann Reader*, ed. D. C. Schindler and Jeanne Heffernan Schindler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 36: “The fundamental act of freedom is that of refraining from dominating what we are able to dominate, the act of ‘letting be.’”

presence is not a matter of passive receptivity. It is a matter rather of actively and generously “seeing” other beings as they are in themselves, in their truth and goodness as naturally given.¹⁴ This contrasts with what Ratzinger identifies as the modern view, according to which beings are true and good only *qua* subject to human intervention (*verum et bonum quia factum/faciendum*).¹⁵ Ratzinger is not denying here the legitimate sense in which human beings are indeed involved in making things true and good; rather he is affirming the priority of first accepting them in their original givenness as created. We will consider below how first accepting things, that is, first seeing them and letting them be, when conceived in the context of the generosity of creation, unfolds organically into genuine and proper intervention.

2.3. *The analogy of being*

Christianity understands this original goodness inherent in beings, and what we can call their originally generous presence in their relations with each other, in an analogical and so far hierarchical way. Only the human being, among physical creaturely beings, bears a spiritual capacity, since he is informed by a spiritual soul. The human being thus bears a unique kind of truth and goodness, hence dignity, in himself, as well as a unique capacity for generous presence to others as they are in themselves.

14. Pope Francis points in this regard to St. Francis’s contemplative “response to the world around him.” This way of seeing “cannot be written off as naïve romanticism. . . . If we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder . . . our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs” (*LS*, 11).

15. The same idea is presented by Francis in terms of the “technological paradigm” omnipresent in our current culture, which “exalts the concept of a subject who, using logical and rational procedures, progressively approaches and gains control over an external object. . . . It is as if the subject were to find itself in the presence of something formless, completely open to manipulation” (*LS*, 106). In this way, Francis says, quoting Romano Guardini, “Modern anthropocentrism has paradoxically ended up prizing technical thought over reality, since ‘the technological mind sees nature as an insensate order, as a cold body of facts, as a mere “given,” as an object of utility, as raw material to be hammered into useful shape; it views the cosmos similarly as a mere “space” into which objects can be thrown with complete indifference.’ The intrinsic dignity of the world is thus compromised” (*LS*, 115).

The hierarchy indicated here, which affirms the uniqueness of the human being among creatures, implies nothing negative regarding man's ecological task as it engages nonhuman entities. On the contrary, in the Christian understanding indicated above, all creatures bear an innate relation to God and so far a metaphysical interiority, *qua* created (an interiority, again, that takes a distinctly spiritual form in human beings). This suffices to establish every being of nature as inherently true and good and worthy of respect.

The hierarchy implied by analogy does indeed entail rejection of what Benedict XVI and Francis call ecocentrism or biocentrism.¹⁶ But rightly (that is, analogically) conceived, this hierarchy bears an essentially positive meaning: the human person as an embodied spirit is meant, through his acts of knowing (intelligence) and loving (freedom), to deepen and amplify non-human beings' own inherent giftedness: *to magnify the generosity that is already inscribed in the "grammar" of the world of nature as created by God.*¹⁷

In light of this analogical hierarchy, it is essential that we speak of human beings as stewards of creation (from the Old English *stigward*: house guardian, housekeeper). It is also crucial

16. "[A] correct understanding of the relationship between man and the environment will not end by absolutizing nature or by considering it more important than the human person. If the Church's magisterium expresses grave misgivings about notions of the environment inspired by ecocentrism and biocentrism, it is because such notions eliminate the difference of identity and worth between the human person and other living things. In the name of a supposedly egalitarian vision of the 'dignity' of all living creatures, such notions end up abolishing the distinctiveness and superior role of human beings. . . . The Church, for her part, is concerned that the question be approached in a balanced way, with respect for the 'grammar' which the Creator has inscribed in his handiwork by giving man the role of a steward and administrator with responsibility over creation, a role which man must certainly not abuse, but also one which he may not abdicate. In the same way, the opposite position, which would absolutize technology and human power, results in a grave assault not only on nature, but also on human dignity itself" (Benedict XVI, "If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation" [Message for the World Day of Peace, January 1, 2010], 13). Cf. *LS*, 78, 115–19.

17. The work of mid-twentieth-century Swiss biologist Adolf Portmann is especially helpful in showing this grammar of generosity in animal behavior. See, for example, *New Paths in Biology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), *Animals as Social Beings* (New York: Viking Press, 1961), and *Animal Forms and Patterns* (Shocken Books, 1967).

that we speak of human beings alone as full and proper subjects of rights—in a way that expresses, in a properly analogical-hierarchical way, the inherent respect due all creatures. As embodied *spirit*, only the human being images God in the full and proper sense, and is thus the only creature on earth uniquely willed by God for itself.¹⁸

There are, in sum, two main principles to be affirmed in the face of the ecological task, in light of what we have termed analogical hierarchy. First, the “transcendental” truth, goodness, and beauty of being: every being is true, good, and beautiful by virtue of creation, hence as given. Aquinas says, in this regard, that in a certain sense human knowledge is the “effect” or “fruit” of truth, rather than truth being simply the effect of knowledge (*De Veritate* I, 1). That is, all things are true (as well as good and beautiful) in their original constitution, by virtue of their relation to the intelligent, loving Creator; it is not in our knowing or loving them that they first become true or good.¹⁹ Second, the hierarchy of nature(s): on the ancient-classical (Thomistic) understanding, living beings are ensouled. They exist in a hierarchy of “interiority” indicated specifically by nutritive, sensible, and rational-spiritual activities. This understanding of the community of creaturely beings affirms an increasing scale of analogically deeper “in-itselfness” simultaneous with an analogically deeper capacity for relation (cognition and appetite).

2.4. *The place of human intervention: Use and instrumentalization*

Here we need to recall again the gratuitousness, hence generosity, inherent in the act of creation. Being a creature means sharing in the creative generosity of God. The letting be that is the first act of the human creature involves *participation* in the generosity of God simultaneously with *recognizing other beings' participation* in that generosity. Letting be is not a passively receptive act: it

18. Cf. *Gaudium et spes*, 24.

19. For further discussion of this point, see my “Freedom, Truth, and Human Dignity: An Interpretation of *Dignitatis Humanae* on the Right to Religious Freedom,” in David L. Schindler and Nicholas J. Healy Jr., *Freedom, Truth, and Human Dignity: The Second Vatican Council's Declaration on Religious Freedom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 75–77.

involves at root a readiness to foster the other's own generosity, assisting in its growth and expansion.²⁰ Seeing other beings truly (that is, first "theoretically," in the words of Josef Pieper²¹) includes seeing them in their own goodness as apt for "giving": all beings, in their givenness as good, seek to diffuse themselves (*bonum est diffusivum sui*). As Karol Wojtyła says, nonhuman beings bear by nature an aptness for being taken up into, and extended further through, the exchanges of love among human beings.²²

Created things, then, in their original constitution as such, bear a generosity: their being as created involves their aptness for sharing with others, for being instruments in the service of other beings, both human and nonhuman.²³ The human being's "use" of other beings as demanded by the order of creation thus extends other beings' own inherent generosity, allowing them to have a wider and deeper presence in the world through the human being's own personal agency. But, again, this does not mean that any creature is ever purely and simply an instrument, for man's use *ad libitum*. This is an important implication of the principles of analogy and the transcendental truth and goodness of being: contra Descartes (for example), there is nothing in the universe, no bit of matter, that is simply "dumb" stuff—nothing, that is, which is constituted by merely mechanical force and

20. "We tend to demean contemplative rest as something unproductive and unnecessary, but this is to do away with the very thing which is most important about work: its meaning. We are called to include in our work a dimension of receptivity and gratuity, which is quite different from mere inactivity. Rather, it is another way of working, which forms part of our very essence. It protects human action from becoming empty activism" (*LS*, 237).

21. Josef Pieper, "The Truth of All Things," in *Living the Truth* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 11–105.

22. Karol Wojtyła, "The Constitution of Culture through Human Praxis," in *Persons and Community* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 269–70.

23. According to Pope Francis, the sacraments are "a privileged way in which nature is taken up" into service, that is, into the relationship of giving and thanksgiving between God and man that is meant to include the whole embodied world (*LS*, 235). This liturgical service has its consummation in the Eucharist: "It is in the Eucharist that all that has been created finds its greatest exaltation. . . . The Eucharist joins heaven and earth; it embraces and penetrates all creation. The world which came forth from God's hands returns to him in blessed and undivided adoration: in the bread of the Eucharist, 'creation is projected toward divinization, toward the holy wedding feast, toward unification with the Creator himself'" (*LS*, 236).

empty movement, and apt at root for what can only be arbitrary manipulation. Rather, everything that exists bears signs of intelligent, creative love that renders it always worthy first of wonder and gratitude.

2.5. *Criterion for good as distinct from bad use*

Generous presence is undermined when our actions do violence to others. Violence comes from the Latin *violare*, meaning to break or disregard, or again to infringe upon or disturb. A generous presence thus becomes a violent presence when one's "use" of the other does not begin organically from within the other's truth and goodness as given. *How* we use others must be determined by *what* others are *in their original givenness*: what they are in their *nature* as originally given and ordered by God (nature: from *nascor*, to be born).²⁴ Violence, in a word, has its most basic beginning in activity that is *contra naturam*.

Generous use of things, in contrast to violent use, will thus involve interventions that are subjectively informed by the priority of listening and objectively informed by the criterion found in the nature of the other as given (created) and as apt for sharing itself.

2.6. *Sin and the order of creation*

The order of creation is revealed in its completeness in the creation of Adam and Eve, and the violence that undermines the original generosity of beings as created takes its original form in the sin of Adam. "God freely confers being and life on everything that exists. Man and woman, created in his image and likeness, are for that very reason called to be the visible sign and the effective instrument of divine gratuitousness in the garden where God has placed them as cultivators and custodians of the

24. In our relationship to the material world, we must "'take into account the nature of each being and of its mutual connection in an ordered system.' Accordingly, our human ability to transform reality must proceed in line with God's original gift of all that is" (*LS*, 5). Therefore "[a]ny legitimate intervention will act on nature only in order 'to favor its development in its own line, that of creation, as intended by God'" (*LS*, 132).

goods of creation.”²⁵ A truly integrated ecology follows the order indicated here.

This order is clarified in the narrative of the first sin (Gn 3:1–24). In the words of the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*:

Disobedience to God means hiding from his loving countenance and seeking to control one’s life and action in the world. Breaking the relation of communion with God causes a rupture in the internal unity of the human person, in the relations of communion between man and woman, and of the harmonious relations between mankind and other creatures. It is in this original estrangement that are to be sought the deepest roots of all the evils that afflict social relations between people, of all the situations in economic and political life that attack the dignity of the person, that assail justice and solidarity. (27)

Thus the rupture in the harmonious relations (or “original covenant” [*CIV*, 50]) between mankind and other creatures arises first as a consequence of sin: of mankind’s failure to listen to God. This is the original source for the false way of using creatures indicated above, turning other beings into “mere objects,” objects without interior worth.²⁶

According to the order indicated in Adam’s sin, then, man first fails to listen to or to obey God: he refuses his original meaning as a child before God. As Ratzinger points out, the sin of Adam does not consist in wanting to be like God—on the contrary, that is the very purpose of our existence. Sin consists

25. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 26 (hereafter cited as *CSDC*).

26. *LS*, 25. The pope links this tendency to instrumentalize and objectify the world with man’s Promethean attempt to declare “independence from reality,” thus ultimately to set “himself up in place of God” (*LS*, 117). This declaration of autonomy manifests itself above all in a “practical relativism” which “sees everything as irrelevant unless it serves one’s own immediate interests” (*LS*, 122). It is this “culture of relativism” that “drives one . . . to treat others as mere objects” (*LS*, 123). On the basis of “the notion that there are no indisputable truths to guide our lives, and hence human freedom is limitless,” we have “forgotten that ‘man is not only a freedom which he creates for himself. Man does not create himself. He is spirit and will, but also nature.’ With paternal concern, Benedict urged us to realize that creation is harmed ‘where we ourselves have the final word, where everything is simply our property and we use it for ourselves alone’” (*LS*, 6).

rather in wanting to be like God *qua* unoriginated origin: to want to be like the Father, in abstraction from the way of being of the Son.²⁷ Second, this failure to listen to God reveals its consequences simultaneously in the relation between man and God and in the relation between human beings—quintessentially in the relation between man and woman, in the breakdown of their original unity-in-difference in love. Third, this failure to listen, and this consequent disordered relation between man and woman, entail a fracturing of the relation between humanity and nonhuman creatures, mediated by the bodily extension of man and woman into the world. Fourth, by further implication, this unfolds into a rupture of the harmony in the original relations among nonhuman physical creatures themselves.²⁸

It is important, then, to highlight the significance of the link between family ethics and social—including ecological—ethics: to see the link between the listening, obedient love of the creature in his original childlikeness before God, and the fruitful, mutual-asymmetrical, love constitutive of the original relation between man and woman, on the one hand, and the order of creation in its original constitution as a cosmological community, on the other.²⁹ Indeed, we may say, in light of the

27. Joseph Ratzinger, *Journey Towards Easter: Retreat Given in the Vatican in the Presence of Pope John Paul II* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 69.

28. “[H]uman life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbor, and with the earth itself. According to the Bible, these three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin. The harmony between the Creator, humanity, and creation as a whole was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations. This in turn distorted our mandate to ‘have dominion’ over the earth, to ‘till it and keep it.’ As a result, the originally harmonious relationship between human beings and nature became conflictual” (*LS*, 66).

29. “Human ecology also implies another profound reality: the relationship between human life and the moral law, which is inscribed in our nature. . . . Pope Benedict XVI spoke of an ‘ecology of man,’ based on the fact that ‘man too has a nature that he must respect and that he cannot manipulate at will.’ . . . [O]ur body itself establishes us in a direct relationship with the environment and with other living beings. The acceptance of our bodies as God’s gift is vital for welcoming and accepting the entire world as a gift from the Father and our common home, whereas thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation. Learning to accept our body, to care for it and to respect its fullest meaning, is an essential element of any genuine human ecology. Also, valuing

Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, that it is in this threefold estrangement that we find the deepest source of the loss of our sense of the generosity of relation and of the habits of presence carried in this sense of generosity.³⁰

In a word: it is sin in its original threefold dis-order as disclosed in Adam and Eve before God that is the ultimate root of ecological disintegration. Needless to say, this does not rule out causes of disintegration other than sin—technical, institutional, and the like. It means simply that sin in its original structure operates within all human realities and, consequently, also within all cosmic realities, and is that which most radically disposes human and cosmic beings toward violent “order” in the first place.

3. ECOLOGY AND THE LIBERATION OF CULTURAL-SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

It is important to take note of what the foregoing comments regarding presence and generosity and the ecological task imply for our approach to cultural and institutional order.

The Church has emphasized consistently in her social teaching that she *has no technical solutions of her own to offer in social-economic matters*.³¹ This does not mean that the Church is neutral with respect to the range of such solutions offered by the domi-

one’s own body in its femininity or masculinity is necessary if I am going to be able to recognize myself in an encounter with someone who is different. In this way we can joyfully accept the specific gifts of another man or woman, the work of God the Creator, and find mutual enrichment” (LS, 155). The embodied family is the place in which we first receive “an integral education,” “the place in which life—the gift of God—can be properly welcomed and protected.” It is in this way that the family, as “the heart of the culture of life” (LS, 213), is understood to be “the basic cell of society” (LS, 157), “the primary social group” from which integral ecology “gradually extends to the whole of society” (LS, 142).

30. For an elaboration of the hierarchical order of community necessary for a proper approach to ecology, and for further magisterial texts in this regard, see my “Beyond the Binary Logic of Market-Plus-State: A Sane Social Order for the Global Liberal Age,” in *The Beauty of God’s House: Essays in Honor of Stratford Caldecott*, ed. Francesca Murphy (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014), 149–88, at 168–70. See also John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, 86: “The future fate of the human species depends upon the family.”

31. Cf. *Gaudium et spes*, 36; *Centesimus annus*, 43; *CIV*, 9.

nant institutions of our time. It means that her interest lies rather in supporting an understanding of the human being in terms of generous habits of presence and community, and in criticizing the breakdown in these that is due above all to sin. It is in this sense that the Church says that she is an “expert in humanity”: due to her nature as the sacrament of Christ’s love, the Church has, by office, been granted wisdom in matters pertaining to that love.³² The Church thus does not intend to offer a “third” way, in the sense of a distinct technical alternative to dominant economic and political institutions of “right” and “left.”³³ The Church intends rather to offer a distinct theological-anthropological vision and way of life that express “a set of *principles for reflection and criteria for judgment* and also *directives for action*” which are to be employed for the sake of transforming the disorders of poverty and injustice as they manifest in any of these institutions.³⁴

Benedict XVI, with Paul VI, highlights “the global dimension of the social question” today, and the gravity and extent of our social problems, and points out in this connection how our conscience today is “invited to take note of technological possibilities.” Needless to say, the ameliorations of technology are indispensable in present circumstances. But Benedict XVI insists, with Paul VI, that the social question remains even now “a radically anthropological question” (*CIV*, 75).

According to Benedict XVI, “the exclusively binary model of market-plus-state is corrosive of society” (*CIV*, 39). In this he echoes what Pius XI had said already in *Quadragesimo anno* about the reduction of social order to “virtually only individuals and the State” (78). What Benedict XVI means by the need to move beyond the binary model is that the logic of both the economy and the polity needs to be integrated by and into “the logic of the unconditional gift” (*CIV*, 37). Benedict XVI recognizes that formation in the logic of gift is the primary responsibility of the institutions of civil society, especially the family, as well as

32. Paul VI, *Populorum progressio*, 13.

33. See my “Beyond the Binary Logic of Market-Plus-State.”

34. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation*, 72 (some emphasis added). Here, then, and in the foregoing comments, we see the core principles of the “authentic theology of integral human liberation” called for by John Paul II in *Centesimus annus*, 26.

more organic, intermediate civil communities. But he insists that the “spirit of gift” needs to inform the logic of the economy and the polity itself as well. Indeed, it is noteworthy that he insists on the inclusion of gift—that is, charity and communion and relation—in the logic of the academy and its disciplines as well (*CIV*, 30–31, 48, 53–55).

In a word: when Benedict XVI says that we must move beyond the binary logic of market-plus-state—and indeed, if we include here also the academy, we may say beyond the tri-nary logic of market-plus-state-plus-academy, in their prevalent forms—he means that we must integrate these logics as far as possible into the logic of gift, of gratuitousness and community, and seek to transform the dis-order caused by sin that obstructs such integration. The crucial point, in other words, is to see that the integration of gift into these institutions is not a matter primarily or simply of renewed spiritual motivation or moral behavior. It is a matter, rather, of the integrity of the logic proper to each of these institutions—*qua* economy, polity, and academy.

I conclude by indicating briefly what is meant by sin in each institution, and the peculiar resistance it poses to integral human development.

The idea of social or structural sin is indispensable for a proper approach to ecological concerns. The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* emphasizes that such sins are rooted in personal sin, which are over time consolidated, conditioning human conduct in ways that go well beyond the actions and brief life span of individuals (119). These sins interfere with the development of peoples, and the distortion and slow pace of this development must therefore be judged in the light of such sins.

3.1. *Regarding profit and the logic of the market economy*

The legitimacy of profit is to be acknowledged, even as profit must be understood, from the beginning, inside the call for integral human development and the principle of universality.

This demands a radical rereading of the root meaning of poverty and wealth. In the view developed by Paul VI and Benedict XVI, and indicated above in terms of generous presence and community, poverty consists at root in a lack of those relationships that

most intimately characterize one's being: relationships with God and a family born of a monogamous union of a man and a woman, and with the local communities most immediately tied to these primordial relationships. Poverty and wealth consist first in the poverty and wealth of love, as embodied in these communities (CIV, 53). To be sure, these "constitutive" relations (CSDC, 37, 109) themselves include and thus demand sufficient material wealth (housing, food, and the like), and efforts to insure this material wealth are essential to integral human development. But any efforts—including efforts by the market and the government—to redress the problem of poverty *must be set within and measured against the need for every human being to be loved and to love*, in relation above all to God, in and through a family. In this connection, efforts to overcome poverty *must as far as possible be tied to development of genuine community life* (e.g., familial and ecclesial community, local communities). Indeed, we finally understand the full truth of poverty and wealth only in terms of the God who, being rich, took on our poverty, so that we might become rich with his poverty (EG, 198).

In light of this, we see that *work* exists at root for the sake of producing something good. As an activity and in its results, work is meant to be ordered by and toward the good of community: communion with God, other human beings, and all of creation. Work is thus not a mere instrument in the pursuit of a profit abstracted from the common (that is, "communal") good, or from the realization of what is "transcendentally" true and good and beautiful.

3.2. *Regarding power, rights, and the logic of the liberal-democratic polity*

The human rights around which the modern state is ordered are legitimate developments, but like the profit that is characteristic of the liberal market, these rights must be integrated into the human good. Rights are to be understood from the beginning in terms of *one's nature (and natural body) as created by God*, from inside a freedom ordered toward and by gift, and thus *from inside our responsibility for fulfilling our naturally given relationality to God, family, all other human beings, and the whole of creation*. It is crucial, therefore, that we critically evaluate rights as they are conceived

in liberal societies—that is, as simple immunities from coercion and thus as abstracted from our naturally given relations. Rights are indeed immunities, but only as tied intrinsically to nature and responsibility to God and others.³⁵

Rights, in sum, are not in the first instance matters of *power* (of one person or group in its relation to others, as implied by the primacy of the “negative” claim of immunity), but of *positive relation* to God and others and to *the good* of all. Governments in liberal societies thus need to integrate their “coercive” purpose into the more primary “pedagogical” purpose affirmed in ancient-Christian thought.³⁶

3.3. *Regarding the logic of the disciplines of the modern academy, especially science and technology*

The achievements of modern science are abundant. But, like profit in the liberal market and rights in the liberal state, they are highly ambiguous.³⁷ Modern science is said to be born in Francis

35. For more on the need to rethink the nature of rights, see my “Freedom, Truth, and Human Dignity,” 155–61.

36. See for example, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I–II, q. 92, a. 1: “[T]he proper effect of law is to lead its subjects to their proper virtue: and since virtue is ‘that which makes its subject good,’ it follows that the proper effect of law is to make those to whom it is given, good. . . . Wherefore the Philosopher says . . . that ‘lawgivers make men good by habituating them to good works.’”

37. Echoing Benedict XVI (*CIV*, 69–70), Francis says that “We have to accept that technological products are not neutral,” insofar as they reflect and “create a framework,” an “epistemological paradigm which shapes the lives of individuals and the workings of society” (*LS*, 107). “The technological paradigm has become so dominant that it would be difficult to do without its resources and even more difficult to utilize them without being dominated by their internal logic” (*LS*, 108). This paradigm “exalts the concept of a subject who, using logical and rational procedures, progressively approaches and gains control over an external object. This subject makes every effort to establish the scientific and experimental method, which in itself is already a technique of possession, mastery, and transformation. It is as if the subject were to find itself in the presence of something formless, completely open to manipulation. Men and women have constantly intervened in nature, but for a long time this meant being in tune with and respecting the possibilities offered by the things themselves. It was a matter of receiving what nature itself allowed, as if from its own hand. Now, by contrast, we are the ones to lay our hands on things, attempting to extract everything possible from them while frequently ignor-

Bacon's dictum that "knowledge and power are one" (*Novum Organum*, 3).³⁸ The power and control sought in knowledge are necessary and good, but they need to be ordered from the beginning in terms of the call to integral human development and integral ecology. It is often said that modern science has its origin in the Christian doctrine of creation: it is this doctrine that secures the legitimate autonomy of the creature and hence the laws or order innate to the creature. This claim is true but also highly ambiguous. The primacy of power as conceived and exercised in modern science typically overlooks the meaning of creation in its original and rightful understanding: that things are *true and good qua given*. It is only through the primacy of listening to and seeing things as they are naturally given (by God) that we learn how truly to deepen and extend the generosity inherent in them as creatures.

This implies no simple rejection of the academy and its disciplines. On the contrary, it means, in the words of Benedict XVI, that charity is not to be understood merely as "an added extra, like an appendix to work already concluded in each of the various disciplines: it engages them in dialogue from the very beginning" (*CIV*, 30). Charity entails unity-in-distinction, and thus the integrity and wholeness of that which is united. In this way, charity must animate the sciences "in a harmonious interdisciplinary whole, marked by unity and distinction" (*CIV*, 31). The Church's social doctrine thus itself "has 'an important interdisciplinary dimension'" (*CIV*, 31, citing *Centesimus annus*, 59). On the other hand, "the excessive segmentation of knowledge" and "the rejection of metaphysics by the human sciences" are in fact "damaging . . . to the development of peoples, because these things make it harder to see the integral good of man in its various dimensions" (*CIV*, 31).³⁹ Paul VI said in this regard that "the

ing or forgetting the reality in front of us" (*LS*, 106). As a paradigm, then, "[t]echnology tends to absorb everything into its ironclad logic" (*LS*, 108), a logic that entails inherent reductionism (*LS*, 107), instrumentalism (*LS*, 123), fragmentation (*LS*, 110), superficiality (*LS*, 113), and relativism (*LS*, 122).

38. "There is a tendency to believe that every increase in power means 'an increase of "progress" itself,' . . . as if reality, goodness, and truth automatically flow from technological and economic power as such" (*LS*, 105).

39. See *LS*, 141: "We urgently need a humanism capable of bringing together the different fields of knowledge, including economics, in the service of a more integral and integrating vision."

world is in trouble because of a lack of thinking.”⁴⁰ Commenting on this idea, Benedict XVI suggests that “a new trajectory of thinking is needed in order to arrive at a better understanding of the implications of our being one family. . . . Thinking of this kind requires a *deeper critical evaluation of the category of relation*” (CIV, 53).



The previous section leaves unaddressed massive concrete issues of great urgency. My purpose, however, has been limited to drawing into relief a single but important point: that it is the anthropology and way of life of modern Western liberal societies, reflected in and brought about by these societies’ prevalent views of poverty and wealth, work, profit, freedom and rights, knowledge and technological science and power, nature and the human body—and above all their view of God as Creator—that most obstruct the ecology that the Church is calling for today. There will be no integration of human and natural ecology, no integral human development, without genuine transformation of these views.⁴¹ As the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* puts it: “Serious ecological problems call for an effective change of mentality leading to the adoption of new lifestyles ‘in which the quest for truth, beauty, goodness, and communion with others for the sake of the common good’” (486) are the key factors.⁴² My proposal is

40. Paul VI, *Populorum progressio*, 85.

41. According to Francis, we are in danger of failing “to see the deepest roots of our present failures” (LS, 109). “The problem is that we still lack the culture needed to confront this crisis” (LS, 53). “We should not think that political efforts or the force of law will be sufficient . . . when the culture itself is corrupt and objective truth and universally valid principles are no longer upheld” (LS, 123). The recognition and realization of the urgent need for cultural and institutional transformation is different from either simple rejection or simple embrace of the current situation, effected through either extrinsic moral correction or coercive measures on the part of the state.

42. The present ecological crisis thus calls for genuine conversion, as Francis reminds us. This conversion “entails gratitude and gratuitousness, a recognition that the world is God’s loving gift. . . . It also entails a loving awareness that we are not disconnected from the rest of creatures, but joined in a splendid universal communion. As believers, we do not look at the world from without

that there is an interlocking set of basic assumptions in liberal societies that enables us to see a deep connection among the vast range of social-ecological problems that we face, all tied to the breakdown of creaturely community, all requiring the opening of “the path of man to God, Creator of heaven and earth” (CSDC, 487). What the ecological task elicits from us today, we may say, is renewed fidelity to the vocation to sanctity, now deepened in light of the Second Vatican Council to include more fully and explicitly mission to the world and the cosmos in their entirety.⁴³ □

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but from within, conscious of the bonds with which the Father has linked us to all beings. . . . We do not understand our superiority as a reason for personal glory or irresponsible dominion, but rather as a different capacity which, in its turn, entails a serious responsibility stemming from our faith” (LS, 220).

43. Farmer-writer Wendell Berry provides a concrete summary indication of how the various problematic features of our culture come together as common manifestations of a breakdown of community—or, we might say, of the dis-integration of human and natural ecology: “Mostly, we do not speak of our society as disintegrating. We would prefer not to call what we are experiencing social disintegration. But we are endlessly preoccupied with the symptoms: divorce, venereal disease, murder, rape, debt, bankruptcy, pornography, teenage pregnancy, fatherless children, motherless children, child suicide, public childcare, retirement homes, nursing homes, toxic waste, soil loss, soil and water and air pollution, government secrecy, government lying, government crime, civil violence, drug abuse, sexual promiscuity, abortion as ‘birth control,’ the explosion of garbage, hopeless poverty, unemployment, unearned wealth. We know the symptoms well enough. All the plagues of our time are symptoms of a general disintegration. We are capable, really, only of the forcible integration of centralization—economic, political, military, and educational—and always at the cost of social and cultural disintegration. . . . That we prefer to deal piecemeal with the problems of disintegration keeps them ‘newsworthy’ and profitable to the sellers of cures. To see them as merely the symptoms of a greater problem would require hard thought, a change of heart, and a search for the fundamental causes” (*The Hidden Wound* [New York: North Point Press, 1989], 131–32).