**Environmental Solidarity: The Radiance of Hope**

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In the second half of the 20th century the environmental crisis became an important element in papal teaching. it was mentioned, along with the threat of nuclear war, in sections 8 and 16 of John Paul II's first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis*. But it's fullest statement came in the 1990 message for the World Day of Peace, *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation.* On the basis of the integrity of creation, the pope argues that simplicity, moderation and discipline, as well as a spirit of sacrifice, must become a part of everyday life. This amounts to "a genuine conversion in ways of thoughts and behavior". The same teaching was then picked up in the Pope's social encyclicals, the main vehicle for his teaching on faith and morals - such as *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, *Centesimus Annus*, *Evangeliam Vitae*. And from there it entered into the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the Compendium of Social Doctrine. In *Sollicitudo*, for example, he insisted that one cannot use with impunity the different categories of beings, whether living or inanimate - animals, plants, the natural elements - simply as one wishes, according to one's own economic needs. While in *Centesimus Annus* and *Evangelium Vitae*, he introduced the term "human ecology" to refer to the intimate relationship between the welfare of humanity, which he linked to wellbeing of the family and respect for the moral law, and that of the environment based on the interdependence of all life on earth. In a General Audience of 2001, near the end of his life, John Paul II expressed his disappointment with the response to these calls for responsible stewardship, our ecological vocation, as he called it, and he spoke of the need for an ecological conversion. This close relationship between environmental ecology and the moral human ecology of the family also became one of the hallmarks of Pope Benedict XVI's teaching. He even set a good example by installing solar panels in the Vatican and planting trees in Hungary, attempting to make the Vatican the first carbon neutral state in the world. Pope Francis has emphasized the importance of ecological responsibility and caring for creation from the very beginning of his pontificate.

The question then arises: is this consistent body of papal teaching - the teaching of three Popes - merely an echo of secular environmental concern which had already become strong as early as 1960s? Did the Church simply jump on the bandwagon, so to speak, or is there something the Church can contribute that the secular environmental movement lacks and perhaps desperately needs? I want to claim the later. I want to argue that the environmental movement finds its deepest foundation, its true home, and its fullest expression in the Catholic Church. To many conservationists this will seem perverse. Probably a majority of environmentalists do not see the relevance of religion or personal virtue and morality to the great issues of our day. To them this is just one more technical or political challenge to be solved, and that is where the problem lies. Viewing things this way, they will try to get their hands on the relevant levers of power and will be increasingly, and everlastingly frustrated, to discover that all their attempts come to nothing or even make things worse. I don't mean to say that there is no point to political action but rather that the assumption that these problems are primarily political is a mistake. We need a new kind of politics, a new kind of technology to solve these problems, namely a politics and a technology that have not been elevated to a level of what Pope Benedict called "ideological power" in his encyclical *Caritas en Veritate.* We need the kind of appropriate technology that has been developed for use in the poorer regions of the world and we need a more local politics in accordance with the Catholic principal of subsidiarity. This would put the emphasis back on the human person and our individual efforts. And above all we need a spirituality that is capable of healing and motivating us, raising us above our human limitations. We need Divine Grace.

The belief that we can solve the world's problems by throwing money and power at them does not take account of the supernatural dimension of human nature. As a result, it can only lead to the creation of vast commercial and political empires that inevitably become corrupt. We must always remember that the call to holiness takes place in the midst of our fallen state. That is why our efforts to do good are so often frustrated. There is no immediate return to the conditions immediately preceding our exile from Eden even if saints like St. Francis give us a glimpse of prelapsarian innocence. St. Francis may have been able to speak with the animals like Adam, but he was nevertheless afflicted still by illness and eventually death. Christ though, without sin, adopted the condition of fallen man, and thus he was subject to the same human state. We who come after, in the time of the Church, are living in his body and to some extent measuring out the years until his Resurrection is fully revealed to all. The Book of Revelations speaks of a new heavens and a new earth where mourning and crying will cease, but for now there are tears aplenty. That's why in the eighth chapter in the Letter to the Romans there are three references to *groaning*: "Creation groans in travail, we groan inwardly as we await our adoption as sons in the Son, and the Holy Spirit - the personification of God's self-gift to us - groans in supplication on our behalf since we do not know how to pray as we ought. This word *groaning* here signifies the sadness, suffering and expectation of the whole world, its longing for liberation and the misery of decay. Groaning expresses the tension between what we are now and what we will become. And it's a measure of the difference and distance, the overcoming of which is anticipated through the virtue of hope.

I find it helpful that the author *The Lord of the Rings*, J.R.R. Tolkein, in constructing a language for the pre-Christian elves of Middle Earth gives them two main words for hope. The word *amdir*, which means "looking up", refers to optimism or the expectation that things with turn out well or at least get better. The assumption that the ecological crisis can be solved, that big corporations can be persuaded to change their ways, that the earth can survive whatever we throw at it - all these fall under the heading of *amdir*. The second word, *estel*, means trust, trust in our deepest nature and the being of things, or in the source of their being, despite the apparent victory of evil as known and experienced. That I would say, is perfectly valid and in its own way, quite consoling, but in the face of so much evil it is easily overwhelmed.

To these two kinds of hope, we must add a third for which there is no elvish word. Christian hope is neither psychological nor metaphysical but theological. It rests on the gift of faith. This is the hope with which Pope Benedict was mainly concerned in section 31 of *Spe Salvi*, his encyclical on hope. There Benedict writes that "while we need the greater and lesser hopes that keep us going day by day, these are not enough without the great Hope which must surpass everything else." This great hope can only be God who encompasses the whole of reality and who can bestow upon us what we, buy ourselves, cannot attain.

Today, as I mentioned, many environmentalists are falling into despair. Pope Benedict diagnoses the problem thus: "All serious and upright human conduct is hope in action... Yet our daily efforts in pursuing our own lives and in working for the world's future either tire us or turn into fanaticism, unless we are enlightened by the radiance of the great hope that cannot be destroyed even by small-scale failures or by a breakdown in matters of historic importance. If we cannot hope for more than is effectively attainable at any given time, or more than is promised by political or economic authorities, our lives will soon be without hope" (*Spe Salvi,* 35). Without the greater hope that Christianity offers, environmentalism will inevitably end in fanaticism or despair. But at the same time the Pope reminds religious believers that secular environmentalists have had good reason to reject them as potential allies. For "modern Christianity," he says, "faced with the successes of science in progressively structuring the world, has to a large extent restricted its attention to the individual and his salvation. In so doing it has limited the horizon of its hope and has failed to recognize sufficiently the greatness of its task..." (25). This restriction to Christianity to the individual level is, I take it, precisely now what we need to overcome. As Christians we have been too hasty to limit the horizons of our hope so that hope has indeed become a feebleminded excuse for inaction.

The children of God are revealed in a life of holiness which is a life in which love has become tangible. The sign of love is not the creeds we adhere to or the ideas we carry in our heads but the spirit by which we behave towards each other and the world which is a spirit of hope. The Liturgy and the Eucharist begin where philosophy also begins: in amazement and gratitude, in praise for the sheer existence of so much beauty, so much actuality - forests and mountains, deserts and stars. Animals, plants and insects are here and gone in a day and their existence is fraught with sorrow but God made them and pronounced them good. In our mysterious desire to unite ourselves with the Creator, the Giver, the find the Source and thank Him somehow, however inadequately, for the community of being we begin to recall the reason we were made and to play our part in the redemption of the world. That redemption must include the whole community of life, not just a few billion human beings. Each of us is connected with all other living creatures on earth through everything we eat and drink and breath. How could redemption be restricted to that which lies inside this fragile, permeable barrier of a human skin? Or the human person be identified exclusively with a particular group of cells that are individually living, dying and changing minute by minute? The Christian vision of salvation and of the cosmos is much richer and more complex than that. Each of us extends to the furthest reaches of the Universe. The salvation of one creature is bound up with the salvation of another and in this vast cosmic pattern in which each tiny piece has a value, the human being, because it possesses an interior dimension beyond the physical, has a central role mediating between the material and spiritual worlds.

Pope John Paul II told us that the human body in fact, and only the body, is capable of making visible what is invisible, the spiritual and the divine. It has been created to transfer into the visible reality of the world the mystery hidden from eternity in God and thus to be a sign of it. In order to cherish and preserve the world and its creatures, and the order and harmony in which they coexist, we need to take possession of the vision that faith gives us. We need to open our eyes and see not only the beauties and complexities of the physical world but the source of its true value. The reason creatures are worth conserving is not just that they happen to appeal to us aesthetically, in fact many of them don't, nor that our livelihood and continued existence depend on them. That would be a sad reason for becoming an ecologist; probably not one that would sustain us for long. We need to open the eyes of faith; the eyes that have been given to us by the Holy Spirit. With faith comes hope, the third hope that sustains through every darkness. But faith and hope depend on love. And in the end it's not even a supernatural hope but love that inspires and sustains the ecologist. Love is the source of value since everything has existence and beauty as an image or reflection of the love that is the eternal life of the Trinity. God's life is the eternal self-giving, receiving, and rejoicing of that who's nature is to exist. The world can have no other source and no other model than this and by being assumed by the man, Jesus Christ, into the life of God the creation is filled with glory so that the merely human inclination or desire we might have had to preserve its diversity or harmony is raised to an infinitely higher level, for in it we are loving the wisdom and beauty of God himself.

Thank you.