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*Laudato si':*  
per una teologia  
dell'ambiente

a cura di F. Neri e F. Scaramuzzi

EDB

PAUL HAFFNER\*

## Theology Safeguards Ecology from Ideology

*No one can put together what has crumbled into dust, but You can heal men whose conscience has become twisted; You give the soul its former beauty, which long ago it had lost without a hope of change. With You, nothing is hopeless. You are Love. You are the Creator and the Redeemer of all things. We praise You with this song: Alleluia!*  
(Metropolitan Tryphon, Akathistos of Creation, 10)

### Ecology and its interpretation

Our aim is to show how Christian theology offers ecological discourse a protection against ideological manipulations. Our starting point in this regard will be the recent encyclical of Pope Francis, *Laudato si'*. The relationship between cause and effect is not always clear and immediate in environmental issues when dealing, for example, with the greenhouse effect, the hole in the ozone layer or climate change.<sup>1</sup> On the one hand, economic interests come into play; on the other, the fanaticism of environmentalists. Who can bring realism and balance to the negotiating table with environmental problems? Certainly the Catholic Church can, as Pope Francis has shown in his encyclical *Laudato si'*. The Pope outlined some principles from the Judaeo-Christian tradition

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\* Professore aggiunto presso il Campus Italiano della Duquesne University, Professore invitato presso la Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Adjunct professor a Seton Hall University  
(paul@jeanhaffner.co.uk).

<sup>1</sup> See B. LOMBORG, *The Skeptical Environmentalist. Measuring the Real State of the World*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001. Bjorn Lomborg challenges widely held notions that the global environment is progressively getting worse. Using statistical information from internationally recognized research institutes, Lomborg systematically examines a range of major environmental issues and documents that the global environment has actually improved. He supports his argument with over 2900 footnotes, allowing discerning readers to check his sources. Lomborg criticizes the way many environmental organizations make selective and misleading use of scientific data to influence decisions about the allocation of limited resources. *The Skeptical Environmentalist* is a useful corrective to the more alarmist accounts favoured by green activists and the media.

which can render our commitment to the environment more coherent.<sup>2</sup> He pointed out that in this tradition, the word «creation» has a broader meaning than «nature», for it has to do with God's loving plan in which every creature has its own value and significance. Nature is usually seen as a system which can be studied, understood and controlled, whereas creation 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.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time,

Judaean-Christian thought demythologized nature. While continuing to admire its grandeur and immensity, it no longer saw nature as divine. In doing so, it emphasizes all the more our human responsibility for nature. This rediscovery of nature can never be at the cost of the freedom and responsibility of human beings who, as part of the world, have the duty to cultivate their abilities in order to protect it and develop its potential. If we acknowledge the value and the fragility of nature and, at the same time, our God-given abilities, we can finally leave behind the modern myth of unlimited material progress. A fragile world, entrusted by God to human care, challenges us to devise intelligent ways of directing, developing and limiting our power.<sup>4</sup>

Pope Francis then indicated the dangers inherent in various ideologies. First, human beings possess a uniqueness which cannot be fully explained by evolution. Each person has his or her own personal identity and is capable of entering into dialogue with others and with God himself. Our capacity to reason, to develop arguments, to be inventive, to interpret reality and to create art, along with other hitherto undiscovered capacities, are signs of a uniqueness which transcends the spheres of physics and biology. The sheer novelty involved in the emergence of a personal being within a material universe presupposes a direct action of God and a particular call to life and to relationship on the part of a «You» who addresses Himself to another «you». The biblical accounts of creation invite us to see each human being as a subject who can never be reduced to the status of an object.<sup>5</sup>

Second, Pope Francis taught that it is also mistaken to view other living beings as mere *objects* subjected to arbitrary human domination. When nature is viewed solely as a source of profit and gain, this has serious consequences for society. This vision of «might is right» has

<sup>2</sup> See Pope FRANCIS, Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, 11.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

engendered immense inequality, injustice and acts of violence against the majority of humanity, since resources end up in the hands of the first comer or the most powerful: the winner takes all. This model is corrected and converted by the ideals of harmony, justice, fraternity and peace as proposed by Jesus. As He said of the powers of His own age: «You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant» (Mt 20:25-26).<sup>6</sup>

Third, Pope Francis explained that the ultimate destiny of the universe is in the fullness of God, which has already been attained by the risen Christ, the measure of the maturity of all things. The ultimate purpose of other creatures is not to be found in us. Rather, all creatures are moving forward with us and through us towards a common point of arrival, which is God, in that transcendent fullness where the risen Christ embraces and illumines all things. Human beings, endowed with intelligence and love, and drawn by the fullness of Christ, are called to lead all creatures back to their Creator.<sup>7</sup>

We will now proceed to tease out some consequences of the vision of Pope Francis as outlined in his ecology encyclical *Laudato si'*. The debate concerning the quality of life cannot therefore reduce this quality to a merely natural and physical level, as do many political groups such as the Green, Socialist, and Communist parties in order to further their own erroneous aims. A structural change, in fact, is not always the same as an improvement in living conditions. Ecology has thus been transformed from a particular science into a general science of bio-cultural existence, and thence into an ideology which we can call ecologism.<sup>8</sup> Stanley Jaki points out how the shift «from physics to physicalism and from science to scientism may provide an informative parallel with the shift from ecology to ecologism».<sup>9</sup> Ecologies that seemingly begin with the program of saving man's environment quickly run their logic to the point where the environment takes absolute priority over man. This ideology easily takes root in Darwinist circles where man is seen to be the product of purely natural forces.<sup>10</sup> Part and parcel of this pernicious view is the erroneous claim that man

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>8</sup> See S.L. JAKI, «Ecology or Ecologism?» in G.B. MARINI-BETTÒLO (ed.), *Man and his Environment. Tropical Forests and the Conservation of Species*, Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Vatican City 1994, 271-293.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 276.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

is simply one of a very large number of species, all equally valuable and enjoying the same rights.<sup>11</sup>

Political ecological ideology comes in various shapes and forms. First ecocapitalism exists despite the fact that most conservatives believe that environmentalism is a lot of hype, and that scientific advance will fix all ecological problems. However libertarian environmentalists propose a *Coasian solution* to the problem.<sup>12</sup> That is, they believe that the problem with the environment is that it has not been divided up into property. Supposedly, if we sold all of the air, water, and land to private concerns, then rights to pollute could be bought and sold, perfectly balancing industrial and environmental interests. Another variant of political ecology is conservationism, proposed by the Sierra Club and other pre-60's environmental groups. These were largely made up of hunters and outdoorsmen who were concerned about preserving «wildlife» and «the great outdoors». Conservationists established the national parks, and still get excited about preserving America's vital resources.

Environmentalism is an approach oriented toward mailing-list memberships, well-paid central staffs, and legal and lobbying activities, instead of grass-roots activism. These lobbies include eco-capitalists and conservationists, and often accept corporate contributions and board members. While most of their members and activities are implicitly anti-corporate, they are loath to openly proclaim a radical stance. Ecopopulism represents a popular approach to the environment. Its supporters are the mothers enraged about their children's illnesses who organize a toxic waste protest, or the workers who get the shop steward to contact the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. Except for the unions, grassroots groups have weak central staffs if any. While these groups are non-ideological they express strongly anti-corporate views, since they are directly confronted with the incompatibility of profiteering and human needs. Their militancy is often undercut, however, by their communities' dependence on the jobs and tax-base of the companies they are fighting. They also usually lack a broader analysis

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 277.

<sup>12</sup> Broadly, the *Coasian solution* considers that a pollution market, and therefore an efficient allocation mechanism, exists if property rights over environmental assets are well defined and attributed. The Coase theorem, dating from the early sixties, was largely responsible for getting Ronald Coase the Nobel award in Economics, in the early nineties. The Coase theorem formally states that for two economic agents, A and B, when A's actions generate a negative externality for B, and transaction costs are zero for both parties, it is optimal in terms of social welfare to allow the two agents to negotiate a payment to resolve the issue – either through A's compensating B for the damage A's activity inflicts upon B, or through B's compensating A for the benefits A will forego by discontinuing the activity.

of ecological politics, and fall into the parochialism of *Not In My Back Yard* (NIMBY).<sup>13</sup>

The expression «Greens» came into vogue with the ascension of the West German Green Party into the Bundestag, and the subsequent emergence of Green parties throughout Europe and also in developing countries. People who call themselves Greens generally advocate multi-issue, independent political action through green parties, but range from those strictly concerned with an ecological agenda, to revolutionary anarchist greens who see electoral politics as only propaganda, to «red greens» who believe green politics has replaced Marxism as a comprehensive radical ideology, unifying socialism, feminism, anti-racism, and so forth.

Deep ecology is an anti-rationalist philosophy, and therefore difficult to define. However, its principal tenet is the replacing of anthropocentric thinking with biocentrism. Biocentrism views «Nature» as valuable in itself, and that all species are equally valuable within it. Deep ecologists argue for a radical reduction in human population, in human interference in nature, and in the human standard of living. They tend to argue that pre-industrial peoples are in an organic harmony with the natural order, and that European industrial culture has severed this harmony. For this ideology, industrial society is like a cancer spreading through a global host. Deep ecologists overlap with the New Age Greens, who are more concerned with lifestyle changes, self-realization and spirituality than political change. Nevertheless there are anarchistic, eco-guerrilla exponents of deep ecology who have blown up construction equipment and spiked trees to stop logging.<sup>14</sup> EcoMarxists continue the Marxist tradition of arguing that all social problems result from capitalism. They often argue somewhat naively that the miserable ecological disasters of the Communist regimes resulted from their adopting «capitalist technology». Ecofeminists tend to be New Age and deep ecologist, though more radical, weaving their insights into a non-linear critique of the entire patriarchal, logocentric, European worldview. Their basic point is that patriarchal society associates women with nature, and rapes and debases both. The ecological movement, therefore,

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<sup>13</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* identifies the acronym's earliest use as being in 1980 in the *Christian Science Monitor*, although even there the author indicates the term is already used in the hazardous waste industry. The concept behind the term, that of locally organized resistance to unwanted land uses, is likely to have originated earlier. One suggestion is it emerged in the 1950s. See A. MAIORINO «Do You Have Control over NIMBYism?», in *Biomass Magazine*, 22 March 2011.

<sup>14</sup> See A. GASPARI & V. PISANO, *Dal popolo di Seattle all'ecoterrorismo. Movimenti antiglobalizzazione e radicalismo ambientale*, 21<sup>mo</sup> secolo, Milano 2003.

must include the overturning of patriarchy. Ecofeminism grew out of women's anti-military mobilizations and has strong roots in the radical witchcraft movement.

Bioregionalists believe that human societies should be decentralized, and political boundaries should reflect bio-geographic locales. Instead of America and Canada with states and provinces, we should have the Great Lakes BioRegion, and then smaller bioregions around watersheds, valleys and so on. Bioregionalists tend to be subculturally New Age and deep ecological, and uninterested in political activism.

Social Ecology purports to be a coherent philosophy of ecological anarchism. Here, humanity is not seen as separate from nature, but rather «nature aware of itself». Un-natural hierarchy has arisen in society, however, and caused alienation between human beings, and between humanity and nature, cutting us off from our oneness. The way to save the ecosystem, therefore, is to dismantle human hierarchy in all its forms, including race, sex, and class, which will return us to a natural ecological sanity. The only form of State that social ecologists abide is the city-state, where small size allows all decisions to be made through Grecian direct participation. Social ecologists are anti-capitalist, and advocate the municipalization of the economy.

Ecosocialists propose that democratic socialism is a necessary condition for ecological protection, though not a sufficient one. Ecosocialists point to the ecological successes of democratic socialist governments of Northern Europe, where workers' parties and unions were powerful enough to establish policies opposed by corporations. Ecosocialists contrast these socialist successes to the disasters of Communism, which completely forbade opposition to the bureaucrats' industrial plans, and to the marginal successes of democratic capitalism, which allowed democratic opposition to the industrial system, but limited the permissible interference with the prerogatives of capital. Ecosocialists reject the idea that socialism by itself will save the ecosystem, and believe that only a broad coalition of the «democratic left», including ecological groups and other movements, can establish a just and sustainable society.

Ecofascism has a well-established tradition, going back well beyond the time of Hitler. The ecological components of Nazism, their central role in Nazi ideology and their practical implementation during the Third Reich are well known. Germany is not only the birthplace of the science of ecology and the homeland of Green politics' rise to prominence; it has also been home to a peculiar synthesis of naturalism and nationalism forged under the influence of the Romantic tradition's anti-Enlightenment irrationalism. Two nineteenth century figures exemplify this ominous conjunction: Ernst Moritz Arndt and Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl.



While best known in Germany for his fanatical nationalism, Arndt was also dedicated to the cause of the peasantry, which led him to a concern for the welfare of the land itself. Historians of German environmentalism mention him as the earliest example of «ecological» thinking in the modern sense.<sup>15</sup> Arndt's environmentalism, however, was inextricably bound up with virulently xenophobic nationalism. At the very outset of the nineteenth century the deadly connection between love of land and militant racist nationalism was firmly set in place. Riehl, a student of Arndt, further developed this sinister tradition. In some respects his «green» streak went significantly deeper than Arndt's; presaging certain tendencies in recent environmental activism. Even here nationalist pathos set the tone: «We must save the forest, not only so that our ovens do not become cold in winter, but also so that the pulse of life of the people continues to beat warm and joyfully, so that Germany remains German».<sup>16</sup> Riehl was an implacable opponent of the rise of industrialism and urbanization; his overtly antisemitic glorification of rural peasant values and undifferentiated condemnation of modernity established him as the «founder of agrarian romanticism and anti-urbanism».<sup>17</sup>

The emergence of modern ecology forged the final link in the fateful chain which bound together aggressive nationalism, mystically charged racism, and environmentalist predilections. The German word *Oekologie* appeared in 1860; some say that a certain W. Reiter coined it. The term was used by the German biologist E. Haeckel in 1866 to indicate the study of an organism's relation to the exterior surrounding world, that is, in a broad sense, the study of the conditions of existence.<sup>18</sup> He developed what was later termed Haeckel's law of recapitulation according to the principle that «ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny», and was first to draw up a genealogical tree relating the various orders of animals. As a philosopher he was an exponent of monistic philosophy,

<sup>15</sup> See J. HERMAND, *Grüne Utopien in Deutschland: Zur Geschichte des ökologischen Bewußtseins*, Frankfurt 1991, 44-45.

<sup>16</sup> W.H. RIEHL, *Feld und Wald*, Stuttgart 1857, 52.

<sup>17</sup> K. BERGMANN, *Agrarromantik und Großstadtfeindschaft*, Meisenheim 1970, 38. There is no satisfactory English counterpart to «Großstadtfeindschaft», a term which signifies hostility to the cosmopolitanism, internationalism, and cultural tolerance of cities as such. This «anti-urbanism» is the precise opposite of the careful critique of urbanization worked out by Murray BOOKCHIN, in *Urbanization without Cities*, Montréal 1992, and *The Limits of the City*, Montréal 1986.

<sup>18</sup> See E. HAECKEL, *Generelle Morphologie der Organismen: Allgemeine Grundzüge der organischen Formen-Wissenschaft, mechanisch begründet durch die Charles Darwin reformierte Descendenz-Theorie*, Georg Reimer, Berlin 1866, I, 238 and II, 286.



which postulated a totally materialistic view of life as unity and which he presented as a necessary consequence of the theory of evolution.

Haeckel's contributions to zoological science were a mixture of sound research and speculations often with insufficient evidence (including use of forged drawings). His law is now discredited and some of his theses became a part of the pseudoscientific basis for Nazism. To observe living beings and their environment, ecology explores every aspect of nature, and in so doing it makes use of all the other sciences. Haeckel was also the chief popularizer of Darwin and evolutionary theory for the German-speaking world. He affirmed nordic racial superiority, strenuously opposed race mixing and enthusiastically supported racial eugenics. His fervent nationalism became fanatical with the onset of World War I, and he fulminated in antisemitic tones against the post-war Council Republic in Bavaria. In this way Haeckel «contributed to that special variety of German thought which served as the seed bed for National Socialism. He became one of Germany's major ideologists for racism, nationalism and imperialism».<sup>19</sup> Near the end of his life he joined the Thule Society, «a secret, radically right-wing organization which played a key role in the establishment of the Nazi movement.»<sup>20</sup>

The philosopher Ludwig Klages profoundly influenced the German youth movement and particularly shaped their ecological consciousness. He authored an important essay titled *Man and Earth* which anticipated most of the themes of the contemporary ecology movement.<sup>21</sup> It decried the accelerating extinction of species, disturbance of global ecosystemic balance, deforestation, destruction of aboriginal peoples and of wild habitats, urban sprawl, and the increasing alienation of people from nature. In emphatic terms it disparaged Christianity, capitalism and the ideology of «progress». It even condemned the environmental destructiveness of rampant tourism and the slaughter of whales, and displayed a clear recognition of the planet as an ecological totality.

Another philosopher who helped bridge fascism and environmentalism was Martin Heidegger. A much more renowned thinker than Klages, Heidegger preached «authentic Being» and harshly criticized modern technology, and is therefore often celebrated as a precursor of ecological thinking. On the basis of his critique of technology and rejection of humanism, contemporary deep ecologists have elevated

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<sup>19</sup> D. GASMAN, *The Scientific Origins of National Socialism: Social Darwinism in Ernst Haeckel and the German Monist League*, New York 1971, xvii.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>21</sup> See L. KLAGES, «Mensch und Erde», in *Sämtliche Werke*, Band 3, Bonn 1974, 614–630.

Heidegger to their pantheon of eco-heroes. Heidegger's critique of anthropocentric humanism, his call for humanity to learn to let things be, his notion that humanity is involved in a «play» or «dance» with earth, sky, and gods, his meditation on the possibility of an authentic mode of «dwelling» on the earth, his complaint that industrial technology is laying waste to the earth, his emphasis on the importance of local place and «homeland», his claim that humanity should guard and preserve things, instead of dominating them – all these aspects of Heidegger's thought help to support the claim that he is a major deep ecological theorist.<sup>22</sup> As for the philosopher of Being himself, he was – unlike Klages, who lived in Switzerland after 1915 – an active member of the Nazi party and for a time enthusiastically, even adoringly supported the Führer. His mystical panegyrics to *Heimat* (homeland) were complemented by a deep antisemitism, and his metaphysically phrased broadsides against technology and modernity converged neatly with populist demagoguery. Ernst Lehmann was a professor of botany who characterized National Socialism as «politically applied biology»:

We recognize that separating humanity from nature, from the whole of life, leads to humankind's own destruction and to the death of nations. Only through a re-integration of humanity into the whole of nature can our people be made stronger. That is the fundamental point of the biological tasks of our age. Humankind alone is no longer the focus of thought, but rather life as a whole... This striving toward connectedness with the totality of life, with nature itself, a nature into which we are born, this is the deepest meaning and the true essence of National Socialist thought.<sup>23</sup>

This unmediated adaptation of biological concepts to social phenomena served to justify not only the totalitarian social order of the Third Reich but also the expansionist politics of *Lebensraum* (the plan of conquering «living space» in Eastern Europe for the German people). It also provided the link between environmental purity and racial purity.

No aspect of the Nazi project can be properly understood without examining its implication in the Holocaust. Here, too, ecological arguments played a crucially malevolent role. Not only did the «green wing» refurbish the sanguine antisemitism of traditional reactionary ecology; it catalysed a whole new outburst of lurid racist fantasies of organic inviolability and political revenge. The confluence of anti-human-

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<sup>22</sup> See M. ZIMMERMAN, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity: Technology, Politics and Art*, Indianapolis 1990, 242-243.

<sup>23</sup> E. LEHMANN, *Biologischer Wille. Wege und Ziele biologischer Arbeit im neuen Reich*, München 1934, 10-11.

ist dogma with a fetishization of natural purity provided not merely a rationale but an incentive for the Third Reich's most heinous crimes.

Even certain pseudo-mystical sects take an interest in ecology, such as the so-called New Age or Next Age movement, which is an old enemy in a new form. Some non-Christian religions, such as Buddhism, expound environmental ideas, but many times with a pantheistic approach. It is no accident, therefore, that for many ideologists the first law of ecology is that «everything is connected to everything else».<sup>24</sup> The New Age movement envisions unity among all peoples, founded not on God but on merely human values, or, at worst, on evil ideas. Already Haeckel was himself somewhat allied with one of the main exponents of theosophy, Rudolf Steiner.<sup>25</sup> Steiner linked Haeckel with his theosophical ideology:

Theosophical cosmology is a self-contained whole, derived from the wisdom of the most developed seers. If I had a little more time I would be able to indicate to you how certain natural scientific facts are conducive to testifying to the accuracy of this image of the world. Look at Haeckel's famous phylogenetic trees, for example, in which evolution is materialistically explained. If instead of matter you consider the spiritual stages, as Theosophy describes them, then you can make the phylogenetic trees as Haeckel did — only the explanation is different.<sup>26</sup>

Often, ecologism is connected to ideologies which conflict with the Catholic faith. It is therefore necessary to be careful: ecology is a science, but ecologism is a mere ideology.

Even some Catholics have recently fallen into ideology by promoting Creation spirituality, or a «new cosmology» of the Universe, parts of which are variously called the «new story», «Earth story», or «Universe story». Generally speaking, today's Creation spirituality movement seeks to integrate elements of pagan religions and the traditions of global indigenous cultures with the emerging scientific understanding of the Universe. In the interests of promoting a more Earth-centred view of life, some expressions of Creation spirituality have by-passed out the

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<sup>24</sup> B. COMMONER, *The Closing Circle: Nature, Man and Technology*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York 1971, 29.

<sup>25</sup> See J. HEMLEBEN, *Rudolf Steiner und Ernst Haeckel*, Stuttgart 1965 and K. BALLMER, *Rudolf Steiner und Ernst Haeckel*, Hamburg 1929. Theosophy is a doctrine of pseudo-religious philosophy and metaphysics started by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891). In this context, theosophy holds that all religions are attempts by the «Spiritual Hierarchy» to help humanity in evolving to greater perfection, and that each religion therefore has a portion of the truth. Theosophy seems to a clear precursor of New Age.

<sup>26</sup> R. STEINER, *Lecture*, 9 June 1904.

need for the Redemption of man and woman through Jesus Christ, and have clouded the understanding of the relation between God, human-kind, and the world.

The French Jesuit Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) is one of the most well-known theologians influential in ecological ideology. However, his writings were condemned by the Holy See. He attempted to create a fusion of Christianity and evolutionary theory, but taught not so much Catholicism as New Age pantheism. His error starts with a confusion between matter and spirit, whereby even material entities are endowed with spiritual properties: «We are logically forced to assume the existence in rudimentary form of some sort of psyche in every corpuscle, even in those whose complexity is of such a low or modest order as to render it imperceptible».<sup>27</sup> This error of panpsychism is followed by a confusion between God and His creation, leading to pantheism. Teilhard described his view of reality as a «superior form of pantheism» or as an «absolutely legitimate pantheism».<sup>28</sup> He admitted to being «essentially pantheist», and as having dedicated his life to promoting a true «pantheism of union».<sup>29</sup> Teilhard goes even further when he denies the immutability of God: «As a direct consequence of the unitive process by which God is revealed to us, he in some way “transforms himself” as he incorporates us... I see in the World a mysterious product of completion and fulfillment for the Absolute Being himself».<sup>30</sup> The concept of Creation is no longer applied in a biblical sense, and Teilhard explicitly stated: «I find myself completely unsympathetic to the Creationism of the Bible... I find the Biblical idea of creation rather anthropomorphic».<sup>31</sup> Teilhard stresses instead the mutual complementarity of the Creator and His creation: «Truly it is not the notion of the contingency of the created, but the sense of the mutual completion of God and the world that makes Christianity live».<sup>32</sup> God's freedom to create is not clear enough; the cosmos seems to be necessary rather than contingent. Moreover, man's freedom is not clear.

Teilhard proposed a new cosmic Christology in which Christ remains too immanent and does not transcend the evolutionary process;

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<sup>27</sup> P. TEILHARD DE CHARDIN, *The Phenomenon of Man*, Harper & Row, New York 1961, 301.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 294, 310.

<sup>29</sup> P. TEILHARD DE CHARDIN, Letter cited in PHILIPPE DE LA TRINITÉ, *Rome et Teilhard de Chardin*, Fayard, Paris 1964, 168.

<sup>30</sup> *Id.*, *The Heart of Matter*, Collins, London 1978, 52-54.

<sup>31</sup> *Id.*, Letter cited in PHILIPPE DE LA TRINITÉ, *Rome et Teilhard de Chardin*, 168.

<sup>32</sup> *Id.*, «Contingence de l'univers et goût humain de survivre» (1953), unpublished essay, 4.

furthermore, Teilhard does not take original sin and the Cross into sufficient consideration. In this understanding, man's cooperation is missing; that is, man is not seen as bringing redemption to all of creation. The Incarnation and Redemption are thus reduced to the natural order, and become necessary rather than gratuitous: «God cannot appear as the Prime Mover toward the future without becoming Incarnate and without redeeming, that is without Christifying Himself for us».<sup>33</sup> The Incarnation seems to be a fruit of the evolutionary process: «Christ is the end-product of the evolution, even of the natural evolution of all beings; and therefore evolution is holy».<sup>34</sup> Teilhard's conception of evil as a failing and not a condition leads to serious problems with his approach to original sin.<sup>35</sup> This leads to a false idea concerning the Cross and the Redemption wrought by Christ. Briefly, according to Teilhard, the concept of a Cross of expiation is replaced by the notion of a «cross of evolution» with Christ conceived as the apex of man's spiritual evolution.<sup>36</sup> The angelic world seems to have no place in Teilhard's system. His eschatology is vague to say the least, and tinged with an evolutionary and Hegelian ideology. The term of his continuous creation in Christ is the Pleroma, the final state of the world, the consummation of all things in Christ. God's continuous creation is directed to

the quantitative repletion and the qualitative consummation of all things... the mysterious Pleroma in which the substantial One and the created many fuse without confusion into a whole which, without adding anything essential to God, will nevertheless be a sort of triumph and generalization of Being.<sup>37</sup>

As a result of these errors and ambiguities, the Church has on several occasions drawn attention to the problems and advised vigilance on the part of the faithful.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>33</sup> See C. CUÉNOT, *Teilhard de Chardin*, Burns Oates, London 1965, 293.

<sup>34</sup> P. TEILHARD DE CHARDIN, *Hymn of the Universe*, Collins, London 1965, 133.

<sup>35</sup> ID., *Letters from a Traveller*, Harper, New York 1962, 269.

<sup>36</sup> See ID., *Christianity and Evolution*, Harper, New York 1971, 216f.

<sup>37</sup> ID., *The Divine Milieu*, Harper & Row, New York 1960, 122.

<sup>38</sup> See *L'Osservatore Romano*, 1 July 1962, n. 148, which refers to the *Monitum* (dated 30 June 1962, in AAS 54[1962], 166) directed at the errors of P. Teilhard de Chardin. The text runs as follows: «Several works of Fr. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, some of which were posthumously published, are being edited and are gaining a good deal of success. Prescinding from a judgment about those points that concern the positive sciences, it is sufficiently clear that the above mentioned works abound in such ambiguities, and indeed even serious errors, as to offend Catholic doctrine. For this reason, the eminent and most revered Fathers of the Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office exhort all Ordinaries, as well as Superiors of Religious institutes, rectors of semi-

The leading proponents of the new cosmology and other forms of neo-paganism also include Thomas Berry, Rosemary Radford Ruether and Matthew Fox. While superficially they seem to raise some legitimate concerns, as a rule their teachings run counter to Holy Scripture and to the Tradition of the Church. They mislead many Christians who are seeking the authentic teachings of the Bible and Church Tradition on issues of ecology and environmental justice. For example, dissident Catholic priest Thomas Berry claims that the Christian story is no longer the story of the Earth or the integral story of humankind.<sup>39</sup> He rejects the traditional Christian vision of creation: «The primary doctrine of the Christian creed, belief in a personal creative principle, became increasingly less important in its functional role».<sup>40</sup> Berry has blasphemously affirmed that we should «consider putting the Bible on the shelf for perhaps twenty years, so that we can truly listen to creation».<sup>41</sup> He has also proposed that «the only effective program available as our primary guide toward a viable human mode of being is the program offered by the Earth itself».<sup>42</sup> Berry's tenets stray far from the Church, when he rejects the Christian ideal of being crucified to the world and living

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naries and presidents of universities, effectively to protect the minds, particularly of the youth, against the dangers presented by the works of Fr. Teilhard de Chardin and of his followers». A year later, in 1963, the Vicariate of Rome required that Catholic booksellers in Rome should withdraw from circulation the works of Teilhard de Chardin, along with any other books which supported his views. In 1967, the Apostolic Delegation in Washington affirmed that the *Monitum* was still in place. In 1981, this same affirmation was repeated, this time by the Vatican itself. The following is the text of the 1981 statement (see *L'Osservatore Romano*, 20 July 1981): «The letter sent by the Cardinal Secretary of State to His Excellency Mgr. Poupard on the occasion of the centenary of the birth of Fr. Teilhard de Chardin has been interpreted in a certain section of the press as a revision of previous stands taken by the Holy See in regard to this author, and in particular of the *Monitum* of the Holy Office of 30 June 1962, which pointed out that the work of the author contained ambiguities and grave doctrinal errors. The question has been asked whether such an interpretation is well founded. After having consulted the Cardinal Secretary of State and the Cardinal Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which, by order of the Holy Father, had been duly consulted beforehand, about the letter in question, we are in a position to reply in the negative. Far from being a revision of the previous stands of the Holy See, Cardinal Casaroli's letter expresses reservation in various passages – and these reservations have been passed over in silence by certain newspapers – reservations which refer precisely to the judgment given in the *Monitum* of June 1962, even though this document is not explicitly mentioned».

<sup>39</sup> T. BERRY, *The New Story* (Teilhard Studies n° 1), Anima Press, Chambersburg, PA 1978.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>41</sup> M. HOPE & J. YOUNG, «A Prophetic Voice: Thomas Berry», in *Trumpeter* 11/1 (1994), 16.

<sup>42</sup> T. BERRY, *The Great Work*, Random House, New York 1999, 71.



only for Christ our Saviour: «This personal savior orientation has led to an interpersonal devotionism that quite easily dispenses with earth except as a convenient support for life».<sup>43</sup> Berry dreamingly sees the world being called to a new post-denominational, even post-Christian, belief system that sees the earth as a mythological living being, as Gaia, Mother Earth, with mankind as her consciousness. Berry's eschatology is false and pernicious:

Subjective communion with the earth, identification with the cosmic-earth-human process, provides the context in which we now make our spiritual journey... It is no longer simply the journey of the Christian community through history to the heavenly Jerusalem. It is the journey of primordial matter through its marvelous sequence of transformations – in the stars, in the earth, in living beings, in human consciousness – toward an ever more complete spiritual-physical intercommunion of the parts with each other, with the whole, and with that numinous presence that has been manifested throughout this entire cosmic-earth-human process.<sup>44</sup>

Berry's approach is more consistent with the views of animistic or shamanistic faiths than anything resembling Christian tradition.

The eco-feminist Rosemary Radford Ruether also proposes a vision which lies far outside the truth of Christianity. The feminist «theology» she represents is rooted in false principles contrary to any semblance of Catholic doctrine. Ruether often resorts to exalting pagan religions and practices against what she calls the «patriarchal oppressive» nature of the Catholic Church. In the first place, Ruether believes the Word of God is a collection of myths and that the Bible has to be demythologized, that is, rewritten from the feminist perspective.<sup>45</sup> From early on in her academic career, Ruether had announced her unfavourable disposition towards the Catholic Church and rejected one of its most fundamental beliefs. According to an autobiographical essay, in 1975 she discarded the doctrine of the personal immortality of the soul, the very fulcrum upon which all discipline and doctrine are hinged, during her freshman year at Scripps College.<sup>46</sup> Ruether came to view dogmas

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<sup>43</sup> ID., «The Spirituality of the Earth» in C. BIRCH, W. EAKEN & J.B. MCDANIEL (eds.), *Liberating Life: Contemporary Approaches in Ecological Theology*, Orbis Books, New York 1990, 151-158.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> See C.R. FERREIRA, *The Feminist Agenda within the Catholic Church*, Life Ethics Centre, Toronto 1987, 4.

<sup>46</sup> See RUETHER's autobiographical essay «Beginnings: An Intellectual Autobiography», in G. BAUM (ed.), *Journeys: The Impact of Personal Experience on Religious Thought*, Paulist Press, New York 1975, 34.



not as statements of ontological truth but as useful symbols, and the Church not as a repository of truth, but as a terrible example of what we all are.<sup>47</sup> Towards a «feminist Christology», she heretically proposes that the «mythology about Jesus as Messiah or divine Logos, with its traditional masculine imagery», be discarded.<sup>48</sup> Ruether has denied the traditional teachings of the Catholic Church, concerning the sacredness of human life and the family. She has actively supported the mentality of contraception and abortion.<sup>49</sup> Ruether has also espoused pagan worship, with devotion to some female deities like Isis, Athena, and Artemis.<sup>50</sup>

Similarly to be rejected are the antics of the renegade ex-Dominican, and now Episcopalian, Matthew Fox, yet another errant writer on creation spirituality. Fox denies the traditional doctrine of original sin, saying that we do not enter existence as sinful creatures: He claims that we burst into the world as «Original Blessings».<sup>51</sup> The only sin Fox recognizes is the sin of dualism, or of seeing people and things as being separate from one another; the only sin is the refusal to see all as one.<sup>52</sup> Fox has written that while «excess» drug use is not wise, «intelligent use of drugs» is unquestionably an aid to prayer. Its value, says Fox, is in opening up one's awareness and also as a temporary escape from the worries of the everyday world. He maintains that «drugs can democratize spirituality, which has for so long been imagined to be in the hands and hearts of the wealthy, leisurely classes».<sup>53</sup> Fox overturns traditional Christology, insisting that Jesus was not good because He was God, but instead was divine because He was good. This denies the objective divinity of Jesus. Specifically, he writes: «Jesus is not so much compassionate because he is divine as he is divine because he is compassionate. And did he ... not teach others that they too were ... divine because they are compassionate?».<sup>54</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> R.R. RUETHER, *Sexism and God-Talk*, Beacon Press, Boston 1983, 137.

<sup>49</sup> *Id.*, «Women, Sexuality, Ecology, and the Church», in *Conscience* (Spring/Summer 1993), 6, 10.

<sup>50</sup> *Id.*, «The Hideous Error of Women Priests», in *Crying in the Wilderness Newsletter* (Autumn 1992), 4.

<sup>51</sup> *Id.*, *Mary. The Feminine Face of the Church*, Westminster, Philadelphia, PA 1979, 13-17.

<sup>52</sup> See M. Fox, *Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality*, Bear & Company, Santa Fe, NM 1983, 47, 49.

<sup>53</sup> *Id.*, *On Becoming a Musical, Mystical Bear: Spirituality American Style*, Paulist Press, New York, NY 1976, 125-127.

<sup>54</sup> *Id.*, *A Spirituality Named Compassion and the Healing of the Global Village, Humpty Dumpty and Us*, Winston Press, Minneapolis, MN 1979, 34.

Like many other ecological ideologists, Fox has drifted off into paganism and witchcraft:

Native American spirituality is a creation-centered tradition, as are the other prepatriarchal religions of the world such as African religions, Celtic religion, and the matrifocal and Wikke traditions that scholars and practitioners like Starhawk are recovering. The contemporary mystical movement known as «New Age» can also dialogue and create with the creation spiritual tradition.<sup>55</sup>

Some writers have absorbed the alarmist rhetoric and anti-human agenda of secularist environmentalists, in this way blending political and pseudo-religious ideology. One example is the ex-liberation theologian and ex-priest, Leonardo Boff. He applied Marxist dialectics and hermeneutics to «deep ecology» theory and junk science, and claimed that we should be alarmed by an apparent resource decline as well as population increases. These, he suggested, threatened «Gaia» – the name for planet Earth, conceived as a superorganism. Boff tends to put the poor and the earth on the same level as being equally oppressed:

The existence of rich and poor in our societies is in itself a form of ecological aggression. The rich consume too much, wastefully and without thought for the present or future generations; they have set up a technology of death to defend their privileged position, with nuclear and chemical arsenals that could, at worst, bring about biocide, ecocide and even geocide; furthermore, they defend a production system whose inner logic makes it a predator of nature. The poor, victims of the rich, consume less and, in order to survive, live in unhealthy conditions, cut down forests, contaminate waters and soil, kill rare animals and so on. With greater social justice they would be able to operate better environmental justice.<sup>56</sup>

Beyond Boff's philosophically dubious ascription of a type of personhood to the Earth, he ignores the empirical fact that, as prominent economists have pointed out, the price of virtually every commodity (agricultural, mineral, and energy) has fallen steadily throughout the twentieth century.

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<sup>55</sup> Id., *Original Blessing*, 16. Miriam Simos (Starhawk) is a practicing witch on the staff of Matthew Fox's Institute for Culture and Creation Spirituality (ICCS).

<sup>56</sup> L. BOFF & V. ELIZONDO, «Ecology and Poverty: Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor», in *Concilium* 5(1995), xi. See also L. BOFF, *Ecology and Liberation, a New Paradigm*, Orbis, Maryknoll 1995; Id., *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, Orbis, Maryknoll 1997.

## The concept of environment

The definition of the term «environment» leads us into the discussion on ecology and its various themes. One can speak of the natural environment, which includes the physical environment with its mineral resources, energy, water, air and so forth. Next there is the plant environment, with its irreplaceable photosynthetic activity: land vegetation, saltwater algae and freshwater algae (in lakes and rivers). Finally to be considered is the animal environment which, together with the plant environment, provides renewable natural resources (food) and also fulfils some ecologically relevant and even irreplaceable activities (for example, insect pollination of flowers).<sup>57</sup> Included in this idea of environment is the notion of a biological chain of processes in dynamic equilibrium, which are important for human beings and their lives.

There are many and various definitions of the environment, and the following steps show how a suitable definition can be constructed starting from a biological approach proceeding to a more human and Christian vision. For A. Auer, the environment is constituted by the whole of our living conditions; therefore, not only «raw nature», but also the «living space created by man». This same notion of space must take into account the interdependence of man and other living beings.<sup>58</sup> S. Langé continues to develop this distinction between natural and artificial environments. For him, «the notion of “environment” today cannot be understood as a natural or primordial fact, but as the result of a historical process».<sup>59</sup> Further on, in a discussion on the relational aspect, Langé delves deeper into the consideration of the environment in relation to the position that every person has with respect to others, and above all with respect to God. P. Henrici proposes that

the «natural» environment of human beings is not nature, but rather culture, and therefore a pure and simple «return to nature» is inconceivable. The real human environmental problem consists [...] in the insertion of the cultural (artificial) environment into nature, with all the consequent interactions of these two «environments».

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<sup>57</sup> See P.C. BELTRÃO, *Ecologia umana e valori etico-religiosi*, Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Rome 1985, 33.

<sup>58</sup> See A. AUER, *Etica dell'ambiente*, Queriniana, Brescia 1988, 14: «rozza natura»; «spazio vitale plasmato dall'uomo».

<sup>59</sup> S. LANGÉ, «Ecologia e tutela dell'ambiente costruito», in A. CAPRIOLI & L. VACCARO, *Questione ecologica e coscienza cristiana*, Queriniana, Brescia 1988, 57: «La nozione “ambiente” oggi non può essere concepita come dato naturale o primordiale, ma come esito di un processo storico».

The Christian faith [...] plays an important role with regard to the ideal insertion of culture into nature.<sup>60</sup>

Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini and the Lombardy Episcopal Conference reject a materialist understanding of the notion of environment:

The human–environment relationship [...] presents complex aspects [...] about which the Christian conscience is called to seek, above all, an initial clarification. Reduced to its most essential terms, it is a question of man's alteration of the dynamic equilibria which guarantee the survival of the biosphere, and therefore of the resources which are necessary for life... Nonetheless, beyond this small reality, environmental crisis can be and is spoken of not only in terms of material resource availability, but also in terms of its meanings and consequent spiritual values.<sup>61</sup>

Archbishop Renato Martino proposed the following definition at the Rio Conference:

The word environment itself means «that which surrounds.» This very definition postulates the existence of a centre around which the environment exists. That centre is the human being, the only creature in this world who is not only capable of being conscious of itself and of its surroundings, but is gifted with the intelligence to explore, the sagacity to utilize, and is ultimately responsible for its choices and the consequences of those choices. The praiseworthy heightened awareness of the present generation for all components of the environment, and the consequent efforts at preserving and protecting them, rather than weakening the central position of the human being, accentuate its role and responsibilities.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> P. HENRICI, «Essere umano e natura nell'era della tecnologia», in P.C. BELTRÃO, *Ecologia umana e valori etico-religiosi*, 76: «L'ambiente "naturale" dell'essere umano non è la natura, bensì la cultura, e pertanto un puro e semplice "ritorno alla natura" è inconcepibile. Il vero problema ecologico umano consiste [...] nell'inserimento dell'ambiente culturale (artificiale) nella natura, con tutte le interazioni di questi due "ambienti". La fede cristiana [...] gioca un ruolo importante riguardo all'inserimento ideale della cultura nella natura.»

<sup>61</sup> LOMBARDY EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE, *La questione ambientale*, Centro Ambrosiano, Milano 1988, 15. «Il rapporto uomo-ambiente [...] presenta aspetti complessi [...] di fronte ai quali la coscienza cristiana è chiamata a provocare anzitutto un chiarimento di principio. Ridotta ai suoi termini più essenziali essa è la questione dell'alterazione, a opera dell'uomo, di quegli equilibri dinamici che garantiscono la sopravvivenza della biosfera e, dunque, anche della risorse indispensabili alla vita... Tuttavia, al di là di questa determinazione minima, si può parlare, e di fatto si parla, di crisi dell'ambiente, non soltanto sotto il profilo delle sue disponibilità materiali, ma anche sotto il profilo dei suoi significati e dei conseguenti valori spirituali».

<sup>62</sup> Archbishop RENATO MARTINO, *Statement to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development*, Rio de Janeiro (4 June 1992).

Pope John Paul II, in the Encyclical Letter *Centesimus annus* (1991), provided an even more complete formula regarding the definition of the environment, which also guards against the danger of cosmocentric neopaganism:

In addition to the irrational destruction of the natural environment, we must also mention the more serious destruction of the human environment, something which is by no means receiving the attention it deserves. Although people are rightly worried – though much less than they should be – about preserving the natural habitats of the various animal species threatened with extinction, because they realize that each of these species makes its particular contribution to the balance of nature in general, too little effort is made to safeguard the moral conditions for an authentic human ecology. Not only has God given the earth to man, who must use it with respect for the original good purpose for which it was given to him, but man too is God's gift to man. He must therefore respect the natural and moral structure with which he has been endowed. In this context, mention should be made of the serious problems of modern urbanization, of the need for urban planning which is concerned with how people are to live, and of the attention which should be given to a «social ecology» of work.<sup>63</sup>

The definitions that we have provided are recent, but there is a history behind the term «ecology». The word «ecology» comes from the Greek *ôikos* (= «house») and *lógos* (= «speech» or «study»). It is the science that studies the relationships of living beings with one another and with the non-living environment (soil, water, air, climate). The German naturalist A. von Humboldt (1769-1859) and the French zoologist G. Saint-Hilaire (1772-1844) were among the pioneers of ecology. In the field of animal ecology, important studies were conducted by the German naturalist K. Semper (1832-1893); in the field of plant ecology, major research was done by the Danish botanist J.E.B. Warming (1841-1924) and the Swiss botanist A.F. Schimper (1856-1901).

Ecology makes use of the studies done by two of the natural sciences, botany and zoology, on the innumerable life forms that populate the planet, and their classification and subdivision into species. In the field of ecology, a «habitat» is the environment in which a given species lives; a «niche» is the function that it carries out in a given environment; a «biotope» is any inhabited physical environment, in some cases altered as a consequence of its inhabitants; a «population» is the whole group of individuals of the same species that live in a given biotope. A group of populations of various species living in the same biotope takes

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<sup>63</sup> Pope ST JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus annus* (1991), 38: EV 13/196.

the name of «community», or «biocenosis». Studying living beings and their environments, ecology makes use of a pattern or model known as a system (developed by another «young» science: «systems science»). A «system» is a group of parts, connected to one another, which modify one another over time in an interrelated and orderly way. Thus, an «ecosystem» is the unit consisting of a community and the environment in which it lives.

An ecosystem is not a closed system, but is connected to other ecosystems via open boundaries («ecotones»). In this way, the entire natural world is understood as a collection of ecosystems. Each ecosystem behaves as a part, or «subsystem», of larger systems. In particular, ecosystems in which a certain community of plant species predominates constitute large ecosystems known as «biomes» (such as the arctic tundra, steppes, temperate forests, tropical rainforests, African savannas, and deserts), which are divided into subsystems that differ from one another based on the presence of differing communities of animal organisms.

The systematic structuring of the natural world carried out by ecology culminates in the description of the entire natural world, the terraqueous globe and its atmosphere, as a vast and unified system, a system of systems, which is known as the «terrestrial ecosystem» or «ecosphere». Ecology's ambition to interpret all of nature becomes apparent in the formulation of the concept of ecosphere, which starts with the presupposition that individual elements can only be understood if seen as parts of a whole. We cannot limit humanity's environment to solely material elements, because human beings are spiritual and material, and this is the reason that God is humanity's Environment in an eschatological sense. The idea of a universe which is a home for man and woman comes from the Judaeo-Christian tradition. The book of Genesis describes the universe as a «tent».

Ecology can be defined as the science that deals with organisms in a certain environment, and the processes that connect organisms with places. The distinction must be made, however, between ecology, which is the science, and ecologism, which is an ideology created around the science. In 1962, Rachel Carson published the book *Silent Spring*, which was a sorrowful affirmation on the state of environmental degradation caused by avid and thoughtless human activity, a sombre omen of the death of nature: this date can be marked as the beginning of the modern environmentalist movement.<sup>64</sup> Environmentalism (which has a certain ideological influence in a political sense)

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<sup>64</sup> See R. CARSON, *Silent Spring*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston 1962.

was born on 22 April 1970, with «Earth Day».<sup>65</sup> Unfortunately, many ideologies of today (such as those of the Greens and Communists) are materialistic, excluding *a priori* from their positions the consideration of God the Creator. There is a great deal of contradiction in the secular position. Abortion is encouraged on the one hand, and the defence of animals is promoted on the other. There is a significant inconsistency in the fact that many democratic countries have the usual abortion law and, at the same time, punish those who, without proven necessity, kill an animal.<sup>66</sup>

Among the Greens, there is a tendency to eliminate the irreducible differences between humans and the rest of creation. In the cultural outlook of the Greens, but also of some other politicians, two primary ideological contaminants can be identified: first and foremost, a renewed philosophical and theological pantheism; second, a materialistic scientism that reduces all sectors of knowledge to the scientific method. These tendencies lead to a reductionism which does not accept openness to the transcendent dimension as a coherent consequence of any non-sectional view. Therefore, in a coherent view, the human environment must include material, biological, intellectual, cultural, moral, and spiritual elements – all in relation to God the Creator. It is therefore necessary to avoid cosmocentrism and exaggerated anthropocentrism. A Christological vision is fundamental in this regard.

In this context, the notion of pollution is not limited to the physical-material or biological realm, but there is also «pollution» of the information sector with the introduction of viruses into computer programs and information theft. Additionally, there is another type of pollution in the field of social communications. Through social communication means, there is a deception of the mass public in relation to goods, via publicity. Then there is the «pollution» of family life and of Christian morality by means of pornography:

Indeed, pornography can militate against the family character of true human sexual expression. The more sexual activity is considered as a continuing frenzied search for personal gratification rather than as an expression of enduring love in marriage, the more

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<sup>65</sup> See C.M. MURPHY, *At Home on Earth, Foundations for a Catholic Ethic of the Environment*, Crossroad, New York 1989, 30.

<sup>66</sup> See M. GARGANTINI, «I cristiani e le tematiche ambientaliste», in A. CAPRIOLI & L. VACCARO, *Questione ecologica e coscienza cristiana*, 93: «Significativo il caso del Canada che “da buon paese modernizzato ha la solita legge abortista” e multa [...] chi, senza provate necessità, uccide un animale...».



pornography can be considered as a factor contributing to the undermining of wholesome family life.<sup>67</sup>

The Internet demands ever more careful precautions against pornography. Other than these forms of cultural and moral pollution, there is also «pollution» in the intellectual realm, for example in ideologies that contradict a moderate realism, such as idealism, materialism, pragmatism, scientism and nihilism. Along with these ideologies, various political positions arise which counter the right use of reason. Then there is «pollution» in the realm of faith, deriving from the many ideologies and false notions that oppose the truths revealed and taught by the Church. In a Christian understanding, therefore, pollution cannot be reduced merely to the biological level.

### Pessimism or optimism?

Pope Francis pointed out that at one extreme, we find those who doggedly uphold the myth of progress and tell us that ecological problems will solve themselves simply with the application of new technology and without any need for ethical considerations or deep change. At the other extreme are those who view men and women and all their interventions as no more than a threat, jeopardizing the global ecosystem, and consequently the presence of human beings on the planet should be reduced and all forms of intervention prohibited. Viable future scenarios will have to be generated between these extremes.<sup>68</sup>

### Pessimism

Before World War I, the idea had already begun to spread that the essentially technological progress of civilization would eliminate everything on earth. Others upheld the existence of an intrinsic, self-destructive process of humanity with physical and psychological aspects. In 1969, at a symposium in the Brookhaven Laboratories one participant suggested that the human race has, perhaps, thirty-five years left.<sup>69</sup> Some literary writers such as Huxley, with this *Brave New World*, and Orwell, with his *1984*, depict a scientific and technological society with all of its

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<sup>67</sup> PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS, *Pornography and Violence in the Communications Media: A Pastoral Response* (7 May 1989), 16.

<sup>68</sup> Pope FRANCIS, *Laudato si'*, 60.

<sup>69</sup> According to J.B. COBB, *Is It Too Late? A Theology of Ecology*, Bruce, Beverly Hills, CA 1972, 13.

problems and deviations. Still others, such as C.S. Lewis (who among other things is more optimistic), maintain the following position: along with the ecological degradation, there is an ethical desert; there will be a conquest of man by man himself. That is, man will destroy himself before he destroys nature.

Many of these pessimistic positions lack consequences at the transcendent level. Many think that the end of humanity or of the entire world will occur as a result of merely human or purely physical factors. The idea of Providence in the culmination of history is lacking, and the notion of divine intervention to end history is lacking. The virtue of hope is also lacking.<sup>70</sup> Many times, instead, there is a notion of chance and chaos, sometimes in the form of the law of the jungle (survival of the fittest) of Darwinian or neo-Darwinian origin.

### Optimism

While pessimism errs in desperation, optimism errs by presumption and arrogance. The fact that a major part of pessimistic prognoses have been disproved by development itself favours the optimists. First of all, upon the invention of trains and railways, biologists and doctors predicted that the human body would not have been able to sustain such a velocity. Then, when the trip to the moon was planned, again doctors and biologists affirmed that man would not have been able to live in space without the force of gravity, and that after a week at the most he would die!

The position of the optimists is often ingenuous. They believe in a future utopia that can be created by science and technology alone. One example is the idea of freezing the human body after death in order to thaw it later. Often under the influence of Hegel and Teilhard de Chardin, they believe in limitless scientific progress. But, in a limited universe, limitless development is impossible; it is a physical axiom. Thinking that the crisis can be overcome by sprinting forward is like the real-life application of that old scene in the Marx Brothers film where they burn the wood of the train cars to feed the locomotive's furnace.

As Pope Francis taught, humanity has taken up technology and its development according to an undifferentiated and one-dimensional paradigm.

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<sup>70</sup> See P. HAFFNER, *Towards a Theology of the Environment*, Gracewing, Leominster 2008, Chapter 4, subsection 4.3.10.

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 ignoring or forgetting the reality in front of us. Human beings and material objects no longer extend a friendly hand to one another; the relationship has become confrontational. This has made it easy to accept the idea of infinite or unlimited growth, which proves so attractive to economists, financiers and experts in technology. It is based on the lie that there is an infinite supply of the earth's goods, and this leads to the planet being squeezed dry beyond every limit. It is the false notion that «an infinite quantity of energy and resources are available, that it is possible to renew them quickly, and that the negative effects of the exploitation of the natural order can be easily absorbed».<sup>71</sup>

While many pessimists sustain that destructive power is inherent to humanity, optimists believe that there is a utopian growth force in the universe, an endpoint that will be reached regardless of the crisis. The factor that unites many pessimists and optimists is the negation of a Creator, the negation of any transcendental cause in the universe, and the negation of finality. Both positions are bound to neo-deterministic explanations based on chance. Christian hope is different. A distinction can be made between progressive utopianism (which anticipates an earthly paradise in the future) and conservative utopianism (which wishes to reconstruct a paradise lost in the past). Both are illusory positions. While pessimism often anticipates the final destruction of the universe and of human life as an immanent process within history, optimism anticipates utopia as an immanent process within science; the Christian perspective envisions an end of the universe dependent on a divine decision.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Pope FRANCIS, *Laudato si'*, 106. See also PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 462.

<sup>72</sup> See HAFFNER, *Towards a Theology of the Environment*, Chapter 4, subsection 4.3.10.

## Realistic prognoses

Realism, in this sense, is to be distinguished from the philosophical realism dealt with in greater detail in other works of mine.<sup>73</sup> There is, however, a connection, because realism in looking to the Earth's future regarding ecology must be based on metaphysical realism. In the words of Pope Leo XIII, «nothing is more useful than to look upon the world as it really is».<sup>74</sup> Realistic prognoses, in contrast to optimistic ones, are distinguished by the fact that they take into account, as much as possible, some eventual negative consequences in the various interdependent realms and urge a decisive, profound attitude change on humanity's part. The true dangers are those which depend on human beings and their decisions. The current quantitative development plan must be supplemented and completed with a qualitative development plan.

Pessimism is also opposed by the fact that some solutions have been found in the realm of science and technology, such as the efficacious recycling of refuse. S.L. Jaki made an interesting affirmation in this regard: «We should not forget that many ecological problems which originate in science, or rather in the attitude of the product-acquiring public, can be solved precisely through greater development of the same science».<sup>75</sup> An example of such a project is research on the possibility of storing radioactive waste formed from the production of nuclear energy. Another approach is research on the production of electrical energy through the process of nuclear fusion, which would be much «cleaner». This, however, presupposes humanity's good will. The criterion must not be profit alone, but the common good in a realist perspective.

Full account must be taken of the Christian notion of creation, of original and actual sin, of redemption and the moral life, in order to resolve these ecological issues. There is need for a renewed Christian culture. It is an issue that concerns humanity's relationship with creation (understood as the visible universe of the animal, plant, and mineral realms), with other human beings and, above all, with God. Once again as Pope Francis remarked:

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<sup>73</sup> See. ID., *The Mystery of Reason*, Gracewing, Leominster 2001, 12-19.

<sup>74</sup> Pope LEO XIII, *Rerum novarum*, 18.

<sup>75</sup> S.L. JAKI, «Intervento al Meeting per l'amicizia fra i popoli del 1988», in Meeting «88, *Cercatori di Infinito. Costruttori di Storia*, Rimini 1989, 204: «Non dovremmo dimenticare che molti problemi ecologici che hanno origine nella scienza, o meglio nell'atteggiamento del pubblico che acquista i prodotti, possono trovare la loro soluzione proprio in un maggior sviluppo della medesima scienza».

Encountering God does not mean fleeing from this world or turning our back on nature. This is especially clear in the spirituality of the Christian East. «Beauty, which in the East is one of the best loved names expressing the divine harmony and the model of humanity transfigured, appears everywhere: in the shape of a church, in the sounds, in the colours, in the lights, in the scents». For Christians, all the creatures of the material universe find their true meaning in the incarnate Word, for the Son of God has incorporated in his person part of the material world, planting in it a seed of definitive transformation. «Christianity does not reject matter. Rather, bodiliness is considered in all its value in the liturgical act, whereby the human body is disclosed in its inner nature as a temple of the Holy Spirit and is united with the Lord Jesus, who himself took a body for the world's salvation».<sup>76</sup>



*L'articolo cerca di applicare l'insegnamento di papa Francesco nella sua enciclica sull'ecologia Laudato si' al rapporto fra la scienza e l'ideologia. Fondando una buona teologia dell'ambiente sulla Sacra Scrittura e sulla tradizione cristiana si evita di imboccare la strada del pessimismo o dell'ottimismo per seguire invece la via di un realismo basato sulla dottrina della creazione.*



*This article seeks to apply the teaching of Pope Francis in his encyclical on ecology Laudato si' to the relationship between science and ideology. With a sound theology of the environment based on Holy Scripture and Christian tradition we avoid taking the road of pessimism or optimism but instead opt for the path of a realism founded on the doctrine of creation.*

**POPE FRANCIS – LAUDATO SI' – CATHOLIC THEOLOGY – ECOLOGY – ENVIRONMENT – CREATION – IDEOLOGY – PESSIMISM – OPTIMISM – REALISM**

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<sup>76</sup> Pope FRANCIS, *Laudato si'*, 235. See also Pope ST JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Oriente Lumen*, 11.