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Ecological Identity and Christian Humanism

Dr. Connie Lasher

I realize that the title of my presentation may well invoke confusion, if not outright consternation—I sincerely hope the lecture itself does not! What is meant by "ecological identity" and what does it have to do with Christian humanism? My purpose here tonight is not only to explain and justify the juxtaposition of these terms, but in so doing, demonstrate their integral relation through an examination of the legacy of Pope John Paul II, and the unfolding legacy of Pope Benedict XVI, as representative of the 20th century renewal of Catholic theology. The significance of these legacies is to be found not least in the way in which their thought carries the question of environmentalism in America and Europe beyond polarizing ideological caricatures which, at best, trouble (and too often alienate) faithful Catholics and other Christians—and gets us beyond superficial treatments of the Church and environment question in ways that many non-Catholics find not only surprising, but profoundly relevant and edifying.

Before discussing the term "ecological identity," a prefatory remark about contemporary environmentalism: There is today a dramatic conflict being played out in the arena of public discourse, but one which simply continues the identity crisis which, in fact, America inherited from its inception. America has always preserved an image of itself as "nature's nation." Nature, primarily in the form of the American wilderness, has always been an "issue" in this country, one bound up in the complexities of our religious history, our economic and political development. However variously understood, nature is inseparable from our national identity. As if this weren't complex enough, the emergence of what we may

call contemporary environmentalism coincided with the "cultural revolution" of the 1960's, 'however variously understood'. And thus the term "environmentalism" is itself nothing if not 'variously understood.' "Environmentalists" are present across the socio-political spectrum. There are radical environmentalists who tend toward anarchy, and there are environmentalists who want to save the environment from the environmentalists. And there are plenty of folks who are troubled by the extremes, and live out a simple, yet profoundly sincere commitment to responsible citizenship informed by their own environmental awareness and concern. Thus, it is all the more instructive, for Catholics and all persons of goodwill, to observe how it is that Pope John Paul II approached the issue, what he had to say about "environmentalism" and "environmentalists."

The second term in my title, "Christian humanism," has been called the comprehensive, driving theme of John Paul II's pontificate, and serves to summarize his life, thought, and legacy. To offer you a very preliminary answer to how it is that this pope approached the subject of environmentalism, my assertion is this: John Paul understood environmentalism from within the context of his profound, Catholic Christian humanism. I trust that some of you here tonight may have noticed the irony, or apparent contradiction, in this. The history of environmental thought, in this country dating back to the 1800's, has condemned in no uncertain terms what is called Christianity's seemingly ineradicable "anthropocentrism."

Unfortunately, many concerned with the issue of the environment have not bothered to read beyond the apparent irony, or have done so with a hermeneutical bias that assumes an

¹ See, for example, Avery Dulles, S.J., *The Prophetic Humanism of John Paul II*. Laurence J. McGinley Lecture, Fordham University, September 28, 1993; George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1999), 386.

equivalent between John Paul's Christian humanism and anthropocentrism. If nothing else, you should leave here tonight with a basic understanding that this assumption is simply wrong.

John Paul's Christian humanism is closely linked to his proffering of the term "new evangelization," which originates from a 1990 encyclical entitled Redemptoris Missio. It is worth noting that this encyclical was presented at roughly the same time as the pope's 1990 Message for the World Day of Peace—a message which became quite famous inasmuch as it focused explicitly on the question of the environment and ecological awareness. Redemptoris Missio is a document which takes as its subject the Church's mission of evangelization. In this document, John Paul reminds the Church that evangelization—mission—is not something that the Church does, it is the very essence of what the Church is. The Church receives her mission always and only from Christ's own mission, and Christ's own mission may be summarized by one of John Paul II's most often-cited texts, from Gaudium et Spes 22 (which states): Jesus Christ, "in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most high calling." That favorite text of the Pope handily sums up at least a basic component of Christian humanism—that the deep integrity of the human is manifested in the encounter with the mystery of existence, in the universal quest and orientation toward transcendent meaning, an ultimate meaning which Christians believe the Incarnation reveals, and in so doing, confirms the very meaning and dignity of the human.

Returning to this document, John Paul II stated, "missionary evangelization is the primary service which the Church can render to every individual and to all humanity in the modern world, a world which has experienced marvelous achievements but which seems to have lost its sense of ultimate realities and of existence itself" (2.4). And this, in sum, is the

basic meaning of John Paul II's Christian humanism: In the aftermath of the twentieth century, a century marked by expressions of dehumanization which virtually defy imagination, the Church's Christ-centered vision of the human person becomes not only her greatest gift to the world, but also her most urgent task. In *Redemptoris Missio*, the pope calls for "new evangelization" or "re-evangelization" of what we might call the post-Christian world—formerly Christian societies in which "a living sense of the faith" has been lost, or simply discarded. And he also calls for renewed efforts in mission *ad gentes*, a renewal of Christian witness in explicitly non-Christian contexts, among which the pope identifies what he innovatively terms "modern equivalents of the Areopagus" (37.11). This is a call for a renewal of evangelization both *ad intra* and *ad extra*—that is to say, evangelization directed in some sense both inward, toward Christians themselves, and outward, toward an Areopagus comprised of Christianity's "cultured despisers."

This call for a renewal of witness to a Catholic vision of reality brings us to another important term in John Paul's approach to the question of the environment: *conversion*—a turning around, toward a new perspective; a turning toward *a vision of the meaning of reality* which we find compelling, transformative. For both John Paul and Benedict, evangelization is about transformative encounter, deepening our own conversion toward the reality of God encountered in Christ, and bearing witness to that reality—witnessing to the ultimate 'sense' and meaning of existence as gift, the Source of existence as Love. The new evangelization is, thus, about the crisis of humanism seen in the last century and persisting in the present, the crisis in the meaning of the human person, and the renewal of "an integral and solidary

[Christian] humanism" as the Church's greatest gift to the world.² In John Paul II's approach to environmental concern, environmentalism and the new evangelization are related because they are linked by this term, conversion—conversion to a deeper comprehension of the meaning of existence.

For the 1990 World Day of Peace, John Paul delivered a now-famous message entitled "Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation"—the first papal address to be devoted entirely to the topic of the environment. In that message he said: "An education in ecological responsibility is urgent: responsibility for oneself, for others and for the earth. This education cannot be rooted in mere sentiment or empty wishes. Its purpose cannot be ideological or political. It must not be based on a rejection of the modern world or a vague desire to return to some 'paradise lost'. Instead, a true education in ecological responsibility entails a genuine conversion in ways of thought and behavior. . . . Today the ecological crisis has assumed such proportions as to be the responsibility of everyone. . . . When the ecological crisis is set within the broader context of the search for peace within society, we can understand better the importance of giving attention to what the earth and its atmosphere are telling us: namely, that there is an order in the universe which must be respected, and that the human person, endowed with the capability of choosing freely, has a grave responsibility to preserve this order for the well-being of future generations. I wish to repeat that the ecological crisis is a moral crisis." In my own research, I contend that John Paul's manner of approaching the issue of the environment may be organized around three basic themes: first, his call to ecological conversion; second, his call to education in ecological responsibility; and third, his call to

² The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, nos. 1-19.

evangelization and cultural dialogue, which may be characterized as "mission to the Areopagus." I shall use these three themes as a basic framework for what follows.

As a philosopher and priest who came of age in the midst of the Nazi occupation of Poland, and who matured into a formidable resistor to the Communist aftermath of the war, John Paul's life and thought were shaped profoundly by the question of anthropology. The twentieth century may be read as a litany of variations in ways of conceiving the nature and destiny of the human. His own seminal contributions to philosophical anthropology during his time on the faculty at Lublin, and afterward as Cardinal, are clearly evident in his papal writings. From its historical roots in Continental thought and the Romantic movement, to its most recent contemporary expressions, modern environmentalism has also had to contend with the question of anthropology. We cannot rehearse here the history of all this, except to say that, from the middle of the twentieth century up through the present, Christianity has become something of a scapegoat for environmentalist revisions of anthropology. Christianity, it is said, is anthropocentric, seeing value only in the human, and all the rest of creation in instrumentalist terms. The "roots" of this anthropocentrism are supposedly found in Genesis, in which the human is given by God "dominion" over all the earth and its creatures.

The accusation against Christianity is that this theological anthropology established the moral basis for heedless exploitation of nature in the West. You can fill an entire library with the literature developing or refuting this accusation—suffice it to say that many environmental thinkers have today rejected it as a too-simplistic reading of the history of ideas. I stand before you tonight as an environmental educator and a Catholic theologian who believes that the great integrity of contemporary environmental concern is not well served by some of the rather

misanthropic alternative anthropologies that have been put forth in environmentalist reactions against Christianity. What has not been sufficiently taken into account by the charge against Christianity of anthropocentrism, and of exploitation of nature, is that the Christian leader who for 26 years was most visible as a global figure spent a lifetime rejecting anthropocentrism, and precisely as this is derived in the developments of the very same modernity and Enlightenment which environmental historians and philosophers also critique.

So, there are two matters before us: John Paul II's rejection of a defective anthropology, and his proffering of a Catholic reading of the human as integral to the question of the environment. This is where the concept of ecological identity enters—an anthropological term I borrow from the field of Environmental Studies. Ecological identity simply seeks to describe the ways in which humans understand themselves in relation to nature, "as manifested in personality, values, actions, sense of self." In a felicitous choice of words, the recent Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church states (in its opening paragraphs in the chapter on the environment), the human relationship with the natural world "is a constitutive part of...human identity." ⁴ Interdisciplinary researchers developing the literature of ecological identity heartily affirm this, and their studies range across the specializations, ⁵ for example, psychology, children's development, sociology, history, education, philosophy, to mention but a few. I believe John Paul II's legacy takes us beyond caricatures and oversimplifications of Christian anthropology, and offers a deeper conceptual analysis which summarized says that a Catholic approach to the environment begins with a theological articulation of a Catholic

³ Mitchell Thomashow, Ecological Identity (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995), 4.

⁵ See, for example, *Identity and the Natural Environment: The Psychological Significance of Nature*, edited by Susan Clayton and Susan Opotow (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003).

ecological identity. Moreover, I want to stress at the outset that, far from being a specialized topic, a Catholic theology of ecological identity opens out upon the whole vista of Catholic doctrine, and in fact becomes a tutorial in it—the dynamic here is not fragmentation but integration.

There are many texts which exemplify John Paul's approach to the question of the environment and ecological identity, and I can select only a few tonight. The following excerpt from Centesimus Annus captures what I believe to be the salient points: In this 1991 encyclical, John Paul reexamined, among other things, an issue that has become only more relevant in the ensuing years, namely consumerism. He asserted that "a given culture reveals its overall understanding of life through the choices it makes in production and consumption" (36.2), challenging the capitalist West to the creation of "lifestyles in which the quest for truth, beauty, goodness, and communion with others for the sake of common growth are the factors which determine consumer choices, savings, and investments" (36.4). The following paragraph turns directly to our topic: "Equally worrying is the ecological question which accompanies the problem of consumerism and which is closely connected to it. In his desire to have and to enjoy rather than to be and to grow, man consumes the resources of the earth and his own life in an excessive and disordered way. At the root of this senseless destruction of the natural environment lies an anthropological error, which unfortunately is widespread in our day. Man, who discovers his capacity to transform and in a certain sense create the world through his own work, forgets that this is always based on God's prior and original gift of the things that are. Man thinks that he can make arbitrary use of the earth, subjecting it without restraint to his will, as though the earth did not have its own requisites and a prior God-given purpose, which

man can indeed develop but must not betray. Instead of carrying out his work as a cooperator with God in the work of creation, man sets himself up in the place of God and thus ends up provoking a rebellion on the part of nature, which is more tyrannized than governed by him. In all this, one notes first the poverty or narrowness of man's outlook, motivated as he is by a desire to possess things rather than to relate them to the truth, and lacking that disinterested, unselfish and aesthetic attitude that is born of wonder in the presence of being and of the beauty which enables one to see in visible things the message of the invisible God who created them" (37.1-37.2). In this one paragraph we see John Paul's explicit condemnation of the "anthropological error" of anthropocentrism, and a refutation of any characterization of human dominion as unconditional or "absolute" (EV, 42.3).

Embedded in the passage just read is not only a vision of the human which this pope rejected as fundamentally dehumanizing; there is also here a summary of his positive contribution to anthropology. Today in Christian theology there is a trend toward the development of what is called "relational anthropology"—the human as constituted not by the autonomous self, but rather, by the self as fundamentally in relationship: with God, with other humans, with all of creation. There is great variety and nuance in the ways these relational anthropologies are understood, based on confessional differences—that is to say, doctrinal principles associated with different Christian denominations—and also based on theological hermeneutics—say, for example, primarily liberationist perspectives, or feminist perspectives. There are many, many perspectives from which a relational anthropology can be constructed, each with its own priorities that reflect a fundamental orientation. Clearly Pope John Paul II

comprehended anthropology in an indisputably relational way, but also in a distinctively relational way. And it is to that distinctiveness that we must now turn.

I will get into trouble with the philosophers and theologians here tonight for attempting to reduce to one paragraph a summary of this pope's philosophical and theological anthropology, alas. At least I am not alone in an analysis of his anthropology which sees it as radically Christocentric, profoundly Marian, and this in a manner which incorporates the Trinitarian doctrine of the Communion of Persons as decisive for the *imago Dei*—for what it means to be a human made in the image of God. In a word, Christian belief in a Creator-God Who is triune love says that the Source and structure of all reality is covenantal, nuptial love. It is for this reason that John Paul II considered his catechesis on the theology of the body to be a theological exploration of the mystery of divine nuptial love which "embraces the universe," for traces of whose image and meaning remain, however obscured, in creation and in the restlessness of the human heart, the human quest for love, for meaning beyond the self.

At the heart of John Paul's anthropology is a certain "asymmetry"—the relation of the self to an Other is fundamentally weighted in terms which emphasize the Other, and the self-gift evoked by the mystery of the beauty of the Other. In contrast to anthropologies which in various and often subtle ways maintain the autonomy of the self and its *choice* to be in relation, what the pope proffered was an anthropology in which these relations are not merely *chosen* by the self, but are *constitutive*—that is to say, reflect the ontological reality—of the self. Spousal, self-giving love is the fundamental image which expresses the structure of *all* the relations that constitute creaturely existence. As David Schindler has written, "This is what it

⁶ For a concise and accessible discussion of this aspect of the theology of the body, see Christopher West, *The Theology of the Body Explained* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2003), 13.

means ontologically to be a creature: to discover that we come to ourselves only *in* and *through* our selves' constitutive belonging to others (to God, and to other creatures in God)....

[The human] is truly at home [on earth] insofar as he finds his identity inside the constitutive belonging to others (God, other creatures) summed up in gift and gratitude. Obversely, [the human] becomes homeless, in the root sense, insofar as his identity falls outside of or is abstracted from this belonging—insofar as his relations to God and others become fragmented."⁷

A sense of the modern self as become fragmented resided deep in the Romantic movement's attempt to recover the self in relation to nature and beauty. The sense of the self as fragmented resides deep in postmodern default positions of nihilism, relativism, skepticism, and well-intended attempts to "decenter" the human. And a sense of the self become fragmented resides deep in the phenomenon of consumerism, in which the search for meaning is distracted into superficial satisfactions of our infinite need for meaning. The nature of human interactions with the natural environment is not simply how we destroy or maintain ecosystems or national parks. It is nothing less than a manifestation of the way we comprehend reality, the meaning of existence. This is the heart of John Paul's call to ecological conversion: namely, that we have lost our vision for wholeness, for our creaturely reality and its intrinsically dependent, relational character, with its asymmetrical ordering to an Other beyond the self. Thus, the question of ecological awareness is not merely a matter of managing solutions, it is rather a profoundly moral issue which requires a radical conversion in the way

⁷ David L. Schindler, "'Homelessness' and Market Liberalism: Toward an Economic Culture of Gift and Gratitude," in *Wealth, Poverty, and Human Destiny*, Doug Bandow and David L. Schindler, eds. (Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 2003), 357.

we comprehend existence itself. In this struggle for the essence of our very humanity, everything is at stake, and the pope has famously described it in terms of a struggle against the "culture of death."

Let me summarize my presentation of ecological conversion by reading one passage from *Evangelium Vitae*, in which the topic of ecological awareness is woven throughout the pope's analysis: Commenting on the "eclipse of the sense of God and of man" which John Paul described as "the heart of the tragedy being experienced by modern man" (EV 21.1), he wrote: "Once all reference to God has been removed, it is not surprising that the meaning of everything else becomes profoundly distorted. Nature itself, from being *mater* (mother), is now reduced to being 'matter', and is subjected to every kind of manipulation. . . . By 'living as if God did not exist', man not only loses sight of the mystery of God, but also of the mystery of the world and the mystery of his own being (EV 22.4)." To borrow the title from one of Walker Percy's books, if the human has indeed become "lost in the cosmos," then ecological conversion and a Catholic theology of ecological identity are about one religious tradition's attempt to help us find our way home again, to the truth of what it means <u>to be</u>. In the pope's Trinitarian, Christocentric anthropology, discovering the truth of ourselves and of the world is

Turning then, to his call for "education in ecological responsibility," I'd like to focus on just a few aspects of his thought in this regard. Here we encounter again the significance of the new evangelization, for the pope calls for an education in ecological responsibility to become an integral aspect of Christian development, as well as Christian witness to the non-Christian, or post-Christian world. As an environmental educator, I see here one of the great gifts of this

pope's legacy—a gift which interdisciplinary theologians like myself have inherited, and will spend the rest of our lives developing. The heart of the pope's message is as stunning as it is simple: An experientially-oriented education in ecological awareness is integral to Christian formation and to human development. In Christian terms, this means that the development of ecological awareness cannot be something tacked on to a child or young person's religious formation, by adding a module on the environment to religious education classes or inserting an occasional unit on the environment into K-12 classroom curricula. It must begin much earlier and penetrate much deeper than these activities, as important as they may be.

Here permit me to offer a quote from the great Swiss Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar, who was so highly regarded by John Paul II, and who was, until his death in 1988, a very close friend and collaborator with the present Holy Father. Balthasar wrote at length about the way in which the beauty of nature, a child's exposure to the natural world, represents a kind of integral formation or existential tutorial in Catholic metaphysics and the structure of reality, a formation in learning to see, and learning to love. The Christian, he says, must become "cosmoform"—attuned to the mystery and beauty of nature's forms, keeping nature as an irreplaceable "touchstone," a source of wonder which confronts us with the glory and abundance of Being, not comprehended abstractly, but through concrete experience, as he says, of "beetles and butterflies" and the miraculous variety of nature's forms. He says: "If [a child] can only become truly himself when awakened by the love of someone else, then he will become a knowing, self-comprehending, and reflecting spirit insofar as he gives himself, in love and trust, i.e. in faith, to the other person. And the more profoundly he learns through this act of surrender what existence and Being itself are, then the more [this] can create a new

surrender, which is now a venturing forward in trust on the basis of experiential knowledge....Whoever grasps this can also open himself receptively to subhuman nature and, thus, learn things from natural beings—from landscapes, plants, animals, stars—which a purely cognitive [abstract] attitude never discovers. The depth of the significant shapes of nature, the meaning of its language, the extent of its words of revelation, can only reveal themselves to one who has opened himself up receptively to them."8 "The witness borne by being becomes untrustworthy" for the person who can no longer read the language of Beauty. 9 Thus, formation in a Christian comprehension of nature permeates all aspects of the development of the person, as well as the development of faith, across the human lifespan.

No pope has been more fervent in his love for the process of education and its role in the formation of culture than John Paul II, and decades before becoming pope he was writing about the centrality of the family in all this. So we are not surprised to find him enjoining Catholic families to teach their children "to love nature"—not just to respect it or to appreciate it or to understand how nature may or may not be used. He specifically used that word "love"—putting an end to any misgivings some Christians may have about vestiges of Romantic sentiment, and reclaiming that word "love" in all its theological integrity. Listen to what he said in a 1993 talk in anticipation of World Youth Day: "Symptomatic of our time is the fact that, in the face of what has been called the danger of an 'environmental holocaust', a great cultural movement has been started to protect and rediscover the natural environment. Young people especially must be sensitized to this need. The respectful enjoyment of nature should be

⁸ Hans Urs von Balthasar, Man in History: A Theological Study (London: Sheed & Ward, 1968), 93-94.

⁹ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, Volume I, *Seeing the Form* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 19.

considered an important part of their educational development. Whoever really wants to find himself must learn to savor nature, whose charm is intimately linked with the silence of contemplation. The rhythms of creation are so many paths of extraordinary beauty along which the sensitive, believing heart easily catches the echo of the mysterious, loftier beauty that is God himself, the Creator, the source and life of all reality."¹⁰

When Christians raise their children with a wholesome love for the beauty of nature as an integral component of their faith, they are fostering an ecological identity. Our daily experiences of the sacramental quality of the natural world become themselves the ordinary occasion for continual conversion which Catholic Christianity considers so integral, just as our daily encounters with the sacrament of the other person are also encounters with the reality of Christ in all things. We are today engaged in a frightening social experiment, in which more and more children are having less and less exposure to nature, and grow up with fewer opportunities for those wholesome, uncontrived, unstructured, playful experiences of nature that most of us took for granted in our childhood, whether urban, suburban or rural. ¹¹ The loss of this tutorial in wonder, and therefore in relationality and otherness, has profound theological implications and represents a diminution in our perception of reality, and the wholeness of reality. This vision for the wholeness of reality, which Christians profess in their faith in Christ, is really all that we have to offer the world—but having said that, and considering the state of the world today, it is everything. That this is so is confirmed by Benedict XVI's continual emphasis upon the unity of faith and reason, and the rediscovery of the wholeness of human

¹⁰ "Prayer, Work, and Nature Must Be Harmonized," L'Osservatore Romano, no.28, 14 July 1993, 1-2.

¹¹ See, for example, Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 2006); Peter H. Kahn and Stephen R. Kellert, eds., *Children and Nature: Psychological, Sociocultural, and Evolutionary Investigations* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002).

reason itself, in the aftermath of rationalist and postmodern reductions of reason—the rediscovery of reason, whose integrity reaches its apex, is not diminished, in the encounter with mystery, the encounter with transcendent meaning, the mystery of Being and its Source.

And so our consideration of the call to education in ecological responsibility leads to the question of mission to the Areopagus. Here are a few of the more noteworthy points to be found in this aspect of John Paul II's legacy. First, as I trust has been at least somewhat apparent in what I've already said, the pope has, by his own activities and witness, taken the Catholic Church squarely into the international dialogue concerning the contribution of all the world religions to the question of the environment, and Benedict XVI has wasted no time in assuming the mantle of this task. However anti-Christian a residual bias may be in some sectors of contemporary environmentalism, the Christian humanism of each unequivocally calls Catholics to recognize several things: One, we must recognize that the deep and persistent concern for the fate of nature is, in its basic impulse, profoundly human and therefore it is profoundly Christian. Here is the Catholic inheritance at its best: The natural knowledge of God, the natural desire for God which classical antiquity expressed in its wonder and awe before the truth, goodness, and beauty of Being is not abrogated by the revelation in Christ, but seen in its fullness, and fulfilled. Many, many times John Paul II called for solidarity between Christians and non-Christians who are also working on behalf of the preservation of the environment. In Catholic theological terms, this is a very simple, yet no less profound, thing: To the extent that someone perceives with wonder the beauty and mystery of nature and nature's forms, to the extent that they know intuitively that there is more meaning to the natural world than merely a supply of material to be plundered, to the extent that anyonehowever negative may be their attitude toward Christianity—to the extent they marvel at a sunset or a flower or a child, they are, from the Catholic Church's perspective, opening themselves toward something beyond the self, they are in touch with transcendent reality, and in some very real sense, they are not far from the Kingdom of God. Environmentalism is part of the 21st century Areopagus and Catholics are called to be present there, recognizing these many people of goodwill, and standing with them in solidarity toward "the commitment to peace, development and the liberation of peoples, [human] rights, and safeguarding the created world" (RM 37.13).

Conversely, as von Balthasar liked to point out, evangelization is not only a matter of what Christians have to offer non-Christians; it is also necessarily a matter of Christians often being confronted by truths which their non-Christian brother comprehends, but which they as Christians have forgotten. For Balthasar, John Paul II, and Benedict, apologetics begins and must perdure in humility. In this question of the environment, there are many persons of goodwill from whom Christians can learn, from whom they can be reminded of what they may have failed to see—voices not only with us still, but also found in the works of, for example, the literary naturalists, voices from times past in environmental literature and history.

In fact, one of the important contributions of John Paul II to the question of the environment lies in his understanding of the history of the issue—for contemporary environmentalism's historical roots are evident to anyone familiar with continental philosophy and thought. The Christian humanism of John Paul and Benedict does justice to the truths present in that development, without minimizing distortions. Christianity does not believe that nature is God, so pantheism is not the way of classical Christian faith. But neither does nature

exist separate from God, as the many variations of dualism have alleged. From the classical Catholic perspective, created being, creaturely reality originates as the gift of love, from Love, and so before we do anything, or make anything, our doing and making must be conditioned by a fundamental awareness of this gift-character of existence and of all that exists, in a relation with the Origin of life that is not dualistic but rather, covenantal, spousal. This fundamental, ontological relationality is the great witness that Catholic Christianity has to offer to contemporary understandings of the environmental question; and, I suspect this focus will perhaps be Benedict XVI's own signal contribution and legacy, as his recent remarks at the United Nations indicate. The Catholic approach avoids extremes which emphasize either humans over nature, or nature without humans. As Benedict is fond of saying, the Latin "et-et" formulation, the word "and," is quintessentially of the Catholic intellectual inheritance; Catholic faith, life, and thought have (to recall the phrase of John Elder) always insisted on saying both nature and culture, and not merely some expression of either-or. In the world today, Catholics are charged with the task of 'saying both nature and culture', attending to the crises of both natural ecology and human ecology.

This leads us to my final topic tonight, namely a few comments on the relevance of all this to the service the Catholic university offers culture—a service that *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* describes as a kind of "universal humanism." Here is a sample from a paper presented by Karol Wojtyla in 1977, which focuses on the relation of nature to the development of human culture—a statement which would later find expression in the themes of *Ex Corde*. "Culture is constituted through human praxis to the extent that we do not become slaves of activity and of accomplishing various works, but experience wonder and awe at reality, to the extent that we

attain within ourselves a strong sense of the cosmos, a strong sense of the order of the world, both the macro- and the microcosm, and make them a dominant feature of our understanding, rather than merely a grand, but somehow also brutal, instrument of our exploitation. Culture as a distinctive social mode of being in the world, one that is essential for human beings, is constituted in human praxis on the basis of a [non-utilitarian] wonder and admiration in relation to deeds and works that have originated in men and women *on this same basis, in inner communion with truth, goodness, and beauty*. Where the ability for such wonder is lacking, where the 'social mandate' for [wonder] is lacking, and the focus of groups or societies does not extend beyond [what is merely useful], there culture as a social fact is also truly lacking, or at least in serious danger. . . [A] civilization that is somehow completely focused only on consumption, is a civilization of the 'death of humanity'."

This places before us the question of what constitutes an education conducive to the formation, in a universal, Christian humanist context, of what Rachel Carson ('mother' of the contemporary environmental movement) also called "the sense of wonder."

How does the Catholic university serve and foster a 'social mandate' for wonder? From the standpoint of educational philosophy, I find *Ex Corde* to be profoundly edifying in this regard. In speaking of the role of research at the university, this document emphasizes the search for an integration of knowledge, the dialogue between faith and reason, ethical concern, and an understanding of theology which places it as a discipline at the service of all other disciplines in the universal human quest for meaning. That term integration—having to do with

¹² Karol Wojtyla, "The Problem of the Constitution of Culture through Human Praxis," in *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, vol. 4 of *Catholic Thought from Lublin*, ed. Andrew N. Woznicki, trans. Theresa Sandok, OSM (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 270-271.

the whole, wholeness—in my opinion, is the heart of this document which itself seeks to portray the Catholic university's relation to "the heart of the Church." Thus, it is not insignificant that the close tie between research's exploration of reality and the translation of this into the realm of teaching should then bring to the fore the role of interdisciplinary studies which, "assisted by a careful study of philosophy and theology, enables students to acquire an organic vision of reality and to develop a continuing desire for intellectual progress," in an education that is "directed toward the whole development of the person" (20). When a theological apprehension of ecological identity as constitutive of a Catholic anthropology informs both research and teaching—whether through personal belief or through collegial conversation—Ex Corde's call for research directed toward of "the protection of nature and awareness of the international ecological situation" (32, 37) in no small part beckons us to find ways beyond the fragmentation of learning and compartmentalization of disciplines. It invites us to a common conversation as member of the academic community, a conversation about meaning which extends from the depths of the development of the human person to the mysteries of the cosmos—from the simple play of a child in the forest to the star-filled night sky which continues to make poets and philosophers of us all.

In this regard and by way of conclusion, permit me to paraphrase an excerpt from something else I wrote on this topic, and offer one last quote from John Paul II. In 1988, he addressed educators in the sciences, the arts, and journalism, stating: "An alliance of all those who seek goodness is extremely urgent. Humanity and the world are at stake and they are endangered as never before. Protect the world, the beautiful, endangered world." In the question of ecological identity and Christian humanism, such an alliance is precisely what the

Catholic university is called to achieve. A Catholic expression of ecological identity comprehended within the context of a Christian humanist orientation meets *all* persons of goodwill on the common ground of our personhood, and our shared apprehension of the mystery of existence, seeking the alliance that John Paul called for. In discerning the contribution to be made by the world's religious traditions to the global response to the ecological crisis, what more can we hope for than for an alliance born of learning together, seeing together? I submit that, in the service a Catholic university renders to society, such an alliance is enough, and it is everything.