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THE CONSISTENT ETHIC OF LIFE OF JOSEPH CARDINAL BERNARDIN AND THE CRISIS OF OUR COMMON HOME

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The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) describes the ecological crisis as the "ultimate pro-life issue."[1] Pope Francis points out in *Laudato Si'* (LS), his encyclical letter on the care for our "common home," that the human and natural environments deteriorate together and that such degradation affects the world's poorest and most vulnerable populations.[2] Popes John Paul II[3] and Benedict XVI[4] also pointed out the connection, even

[1]CBCP [Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines], "What is Happening to Our Beautiful Land? A Pastoral Letter on Ecology from the Catholic Bishops of the Philippines," in D. Christiansen & W. Grazer, eds., *And God Saw That It Was Good: Catholic Theology and the Environment* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1996), 317.

[2]Francis, *Laudato Si'* [On Care for Our Common Home] (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015), no. 48. Hereafter referred to as LS.

[3]See, for example, John Paul II, "Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace (Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation)" (January 1, 1990), nos. 8–9.

[4]See, for example, Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* [On Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth] (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2009), no. 51.

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before Francis did, between the protection of human life and that of our common home.

In light of these and of our increased awareness of the situation we all face, this essay seeks to view this crisis through the lens of Joseph Cardinal Bernardin's moral vision of a consistent ethic of life (CEL). It argues that the CEL must expand its moral vision by paying attention particularly to the modern ecological crisis. In doing so, it can make its own contributions to our efforts in caring for our common home by considering this crisis as a "pro-life" issue, that is, as something inseparably linked to our duty to protect and promote human life.

The first part of this essay provides a background of the CEL. This is followed by a brief survey of the challenges posed by anthropogenic global warming and associated climate change—a defining issue of our time—with the aim of making the CEL more ecologically-sensitive. The third part proposes Francis's call for an integral ecology as a dialogue partner for an ecologically-sensitive CEL. Finally, the essay concludes by identifying some possible ways by which a reframed CEL can contribute to our efforts in caring for our planet.

Joseph Cardinal Bernardin's Consistent Ethic of Life

Bernardin first spoke about CEL nearly 36 years ago in his December 6, 1983 Gannon Lecture at Fordham University entitled "A Consistent Ethic of Life: An American Catholic Dialogue." There the Cardinal linked together "right to life" issues (e.g., abortion, war, euthanasia, and capital punishment) with "quality of life" concerns (e.g., poverty, care for the vulnerable, racism, and health care), the basis being the dignity of the human person, the sanctity of human life, and, as a consequence, the personal and social responsibilities of protecting and preserving the latter in all its stages.[5]

[5]J. Bernardin, "A Consistent Ethic of Life: An American Catholic Dialogue" (Gannon Lecture, Fordham University, December 6, 1983), in T. Nairn, ed., *The Seamless Garment: Writings on the Consistent Ethic of Life* (New York: Orbis

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It can be difficult, however, to describe precisely what the CEL is as Bernardin himself was not very clear about it and described it in different ways. He frequently identified it in particular as a "moral vision,"[6] an "ethical argument sustaining that vision,"[7] and as a "moral argument."[8] Other authors describe the consistent ethic of life in various ways as well—Kenneth R. Overberg calls it a "comprehensive ethical system"[9] while James T. Bretzke characterizes it as an "approach to Catholic Social Teaching."[10]

A more fruitful exercise, then, when attempting to characterize what the CEL is may be to examine what it seeks and does not seek to do. Indeed, what Bernardin wishes to accomplish is clear from his Fordham lecture and subsequent talks and speeches—namely, to link together different issues concerning human life, particularly right to life and quality of life. Building upon the final section of the U.S. bishops' pastoral letter on nuclear war,[11] which linked the moral issue of war with reverence for all human life, Bernardin asserts that the Catholic

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Books, 2008), 10–13. Hereafter referred to as SG with appropriate page numbers. The title of the specific address given by Bernardin, together with its nature, occasion, and place and date it was given, will be provided, if available, on the first time it is cited.

[6]J. Bernardin, "A Consistent Ethic of Life: Continuing the Dialogue" (William Wade Lecture Series, St. Louis University, March 11, 1984), in SG, 16–17.

[7]J. Bernardin, "Address to the Consistent Ethic of Life Conference" (Portland, OR, October 4, 1986), in SG, 120.

[8]J. Bernardin, "The Church's Witness to Life" (Seattle University, March 2, 1986), in SG, 104.

[9]K. Overberg, "The Consistent Ethic of Life: Putting Morality and Spirituality into Practice," *New Theology Review* 19:1 (2006): 62.

[10]J. Bretzke, "Consistent Ethic of Life," in *Handbook of Roman Catholic Moral Terms* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 49–50.

[11]National Conference of Catholic Bishops, "The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response" (May 3, 1983).

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position on abortion demands that the Church and society seek to influence a "heroic social ethic."[12] He writes:

> If one contends, as we do, that the right of every fetus to be born should be protected by civil law and supported by civil consensus, then our moral, political, and economic responsibilities do not stop at the moment of birth. Those who defend the right to life of the weakest among us must be equally visible in support of the quality of life of the powerless among us: the old and the young, the hungry and the homeless, the undocumented immigrant and the unemployed worker.[13]

In calling to stand for the protection of the right to life and promotion of the rights that enhance life from "womb to tomb," Bernardin seeks to rule out contradictory moral positions concerning the unique value of human life:

> Consistency means we cannot have it both ways: we cannot urge a compassionate society and vigorous public policy to protect the rights of the unborn and then argue that compassion and significant public programs on behalf of the needy undermine the moral fiber of the society or are beyond the proper scope of governmental responsibility.[14]

Thus, individuals and groups who pursue one or several issues should do so in ways that support a systemic vision of life. For Bernardin, it is necessary "to cultivate a conscious explicit connection among the several issues." Indeed, it is even more important for individuals and groups who witness to life across its different stages to not be seen as insensitive or even opposed to other moral claims along life's overall spectrum. A CEL calls for everyone "not to stand against each other when the protection *and* the promotion of life are at stake."[15]

Yet even as it strives to link different life issues together and rule out contradictory moral positions about the unique value of human life, the CEL does not ask everyone to do everything. Bernardin himself

[12]Bernardin, "A Consistent Ethic of Life: An American Catholic Dialogue," 12–13.

[13]Bernardin, "A Consistent Ethic of Life: An American Catholic Dialogue," 13.

[14]Bernardin, "A Consistent Ethic of Life: An American Catholic Dialogue," 13.

[15]Bernardin, "A Consistent Ethic of Life: Continuing the Dialogue," 17.

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admits that "no one can do everything, and [that] the complexity of the various issues demands some specialization."[16] Furthermore, the CEL recognizes that each of these issues is different and that each has its own meaning and morality; thus, they should not be collapsed into one. As such, Bernardin clarifies that the problem of taking human life (e.g., through abortion, capital punishment, euthanasia, and in war) cannot be equated with the problem of promoting human dignity (e.g., through humane social policies). Each of these issues is distinct, increasingly complex, and deserves individual treatment, even though a CEL recognizes that the protection of human life and its promotion are moral questions that must be confronted as pieces of a larger pattern.[17]

Inconsistent attitudes and moral positions concerning human life are obvious reasons why there is a need for a CEL. Having worked on the pastoral letter "The Challenge of Peace" and been the chairman of the U.S. National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Pro-Life Committee, Bernardin has worked with people from both anti-abortion- and justice-related camps. He observes that one is met with considerable opposition from different sources along the political and ideological spectrums when the principle prohibiting the direct taking of innocent human life is carried into the public debate. Some see the clarity of the principle's application in abortion and yet argue that it is beyond the purview of bishops to apply it to matters of national security; conversely, others understand the potential of the principle in questions about war but see its application in the issue of abortion as an affront to private choice.[18]

Yet while the inconsistency of such attitudes and moral positions that stem from different political and ideological camps appears to be the most apparent reason for the need to develop a CEL, Bernardin

[16]J. Bernardin, "A Consistent Ethic for Church and Society" (Annual Meeting of Diocesan Pro-Life Directors, Denver, CO, August 8, 1988), in SG, 175.

[17]Bernardin, "A Consistent Ethic of Life: An American Catholic Dialogue," 11 and Bernardin, "A Consistent Ethic of Life: Continuing the Dialogue," 17.

[18]Bernardin, "A Consistent Ethic of Life: An American Catholic Dialogue," 12.

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did not elaborate on this. Instead, he identifies and expounds on other reasons for the formulation of a CEL; for the sake of brevity and for the purposes of this essay, we will focus on only one, namely, the *technological challenge*.

Bernardin remarks that the CEL is both old and new. Life has always been threatened; issues such as infanticide, war, aggression, and capital punishment are not new. What is new is the context in which life is endangered, and this context is what shapes the content of the CEL. The principal cause for this new context, Bernardin argues, is modern technology, which prompts a sharper awareness of the fragility of human life. Rapidly developing technology creates new opportunities to care for human life across all its stages yet also presents new potential threats against it. War, for instance, has always threatened human life, but the threat is qualitatively different owing to the proliferation of nuclear weapons and other sophisticated means of warfare that threaten life on a previously unimaginable scale. The problems of modern technology—along with politics—thus provide a broader context that brings out more vividly the multiple ways in which life is threatened.[19]

Bernardin makes it clear that he is condemning neither politics nor technology. Citing John Paul II, he recognizes that "it is only through a conscious choice and through a deliberate policy that humanity can survive."[20] The essential question that should be asked regarding the technological challenge is this: "In an age when we *can* do almost anything, how do we decide what we *ought* to do … how do we decide morally what *we never should do*?"[21]

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[19]Bernardin, "A Consistent Ethic of Life: An American Catholic Dialogue," 11. See also Bernardin, "A Consistent Ethic of Life: Continuing the Dialogue," 16; J. Bernardin, "An Update on the Consistent Ethic of Life" (North American College, Rome, January 23, 1991), in SG, 201–210; and J. Bernardin, "The Consistent Ethic of Life" (Annual Helder Camara Lecture, Melbourne, Australia, February 23, 1995), in SG, 261.

[20]John Paul II, "Address to Scientists and Representatives of the United Nations University" (February 25, 1981), no. 4.

[21]Bernardin, "A Consistent Ethic of Life: An American Catholic Dialogue," 11.

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This technological challenge cuts across both "macro-questions" of peace and "micro-questions" of medical ethics. From nuclear weapons to genetics and medicine, technology provides the material link between these issues; the moral link, however, is the unique value of human life.[22]

In summary, the technological challenge, the inconsistent attitudes people hold toward different issues along the spectrum of life, and how people tend to step against each other as they pursue their own advocacies are the driving forces behind Bernardin's call for a CEL. The threat against the dignity of the human person and the sanctity of human life is recognized in one area and overlooked or ignored in another. Some individuals and groups, believing that their concern is the most, if not the only, important one, step over those who do not share their vision. Human life and dignity are threatened in multifarious ways because of technology and a societal erosion of the value of life. And yet a CEL that acknowledges the worth of human dignity and life across different stages and circumstances would recognize these new threats and weed out contradictory moral positions about the value of human dignity and life while neither collapsing all issues into one nor saying that all of them are equally urgent. Thomas A. Shannon aptly summarizes Bernardin's call: "we cannot be schizophrenic in our moral approach to reality, nor can we simply address moral issues in an ad hoc fashion."[23]

Our Common Home in Peril: Anthropogenic Climate Change and Associated Global Warming

In order to give context to this essay, we will briefly probe a major problem that is besetting our common home, namely, anthropogenic climate change and associated global warming. It must be noted that

[22]Bernardin, "An Update on the Consistent Ethic of Life," 201.

[23]T. Shannon, "An Overview of the Key Ideas in the Consistent Ethic of Life," in SG, 4.

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this survey will not be extensive; instead, it will be carried out in a summary fashion since many detailed and complex studies on the topic have already been accomplished. The limited space available, in any case, would not do justice to the intricacy of this problem. More to the point, however, our aim is not so much to give a thorough account of the matter as it is to establish the reasons why the CEL should become attentive to what is happening to the ecological system of our common home. Finally, it must be noted that this review follows the precautionary principle (LS no. 186). In other words, unless decisive evidence to the contrary is provided, it must be assumed that these problems cause harm to natural and human systems and that the human person bears significant responsibility for such, both personally and socially.[24] Indeed, some consider climate change to be the defining issue of our time. It is even described as our common home's greatest collective challenge to civilization.

The warming of the planet Earth is not necessarily negative in itself. Without this natural warming mechanism or "greenhouse effect," life on earth as we know it would not be possible.[25] Changes in the Earth's climate system[26] are not new as it has experienced variable

[24]For more details concerning the precautionary principle, see the following: Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004), no. 469; United Nations, *Rio Declaration on the Environment and Development*, Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, 1992), principle 15.

[25]The functioning of the climate system is likened to a "greenhouse" because both natural and human gases contribute to the trapping of heat near the Earth's thin atmospheric layer; this, in turn, slows down the release of energy into space. Since the temperature of the Earth can be characterized as a balance between incoming solar radiation and outgoing radiation emitted by the planet in the form of heat or infrared, the planet will heat itself up until the incoming and outgoing energies balance each other out. For more details, see R. Brecha, "The Physical Science of Climate Change," in V. Miller, ed., *The Theological and Ecological Vision of Laudato Si': Everything is Connected* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 30–31.

[26]The difference between weather (daily fluctuations in temperature, precipitation, barometric pressure, etc.) and climate can be characterized in terms

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changes—largely driven by natural factors—throughout history.[27] However, in its *Climate Change Synthesis Report* published in 2014, the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) points out that not only is the current warming of the Earth's climate system "unequivocal" but also much of the observed changes since the 1950s are "unprecedented" relative to what normally occurs over decades or millennia. The IPCC also indicates that there is clear human influence on this warming of the climate system—it is *anthropogenic*, i.e., resulting from/caused by humans and their activities. Emissions of greenhouse gases or "GHGs" (majority of which is carbon dioxide or CO_2 from fossil fuel combustion and industrial processes, followed by methane or CH_4 and, finally, by nitrous oxide or N_2O) have increased since the pre-industrial era,[28] leading to an atmospheric concentration of GHGs that is unprecedented in at least the last 800,000 years. Economic and population growth, which remain to be the foremost drivers of CO_2 emissions from fossil fuel combustion, chiefly account for this surge. The IPCC insists that it is "extremely likely" that more than half of the perceived increase in average global surface temperature from 1951 to 2010 was caused by anthropogenic factors, including the increase in GHG concentrations.[29]

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of timescales. Climate refers to an average of weather conditions over a specific period of time (e.g., 10 years, 30 years, etc.) that seeks to define a baseline and examine deviations with respect to that longer-term average. For more details, see Brecha, "The Physical Science of Climate Change," 31.

[27]See Brecha, "The Physical Science of Climate Change," 31–38. For more details about the Earth's climate history, see S. Weart, *The Discovery of Global Warming*, rev. & exp. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008). Parts of this book can be viewed at https://history.aip.org/climate/index.htm (accessed Nov. 1, 2019) and in The Geological Society of London, "Climate Change: Evidence from the Geological Record: A Statement from the Geological Society of London" (November 2010).

[28]These are called greenhouse gases because they contribute to the trapping of heat near the Earth's surface.

[29]IPCC [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change], *Climate Change 2014 Synthesis Report* (Geneva: IPCC, 2015), 2–6.

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This anthropogenic warming and its associated climate change have far-reaching effects on both *human* and *natural* systems which can lead to a crisis of our common home.[30] Four of these effects will be sketched out in what follows. First, extreme changes in many weather and climate events since ca. 1950 have been observed, particularly a decrease in cold temperature extremes and an increase in warm temperature extremes. This results in extreme weather conditions such as heavy rains, rising sea levels, frequent floods, super typhoons, and storm surges as well as heat wave, drought, wildfires, etc. In their study of tropical cyclone characteristics, paths, and landfalls in the Philippines from 1945 to 2013, for example, Hiroshi Takagi and Miguel Esteban discovered that warmer sea surface temperatures surrounding the Philippines contributed to the unusual paths and increased intensity of recent tropical cyclones in the country, particularly of super typhoon "Yolanda" (international code name "Haiyan").[31] Indeed, the IPCC expresses "very high confidence" that "impacts from recent climate-related extremes, such as heat waves, droughts, floods, cyclones and wildfires, reveal [the] significant vulnerability and exposure of some ecosystems and many human systems to current climate variability."[32]

Second, climate change also threatens biodiversity. Though the planet has faced species extinction before,[33] the current rate of

[30]Operation Noah, *Between the Flood and the Rainbow: Climate Change and the Church's Social Teaching—A Study Guide* (London: Operation Noah, 2008), 1.

[31]H. Takagi & M. Esteban, "Statistics of Tropical Cyclone Landfalls in the Philippines: Unusual Characteristics of 2013 Typhoon Haiyan," *Natural Hazards* 80:1 (2016): 211–222.

[32]IPCC, *Climate Change 2014 Synthesis Report*, 7–8. See also J. Kureethadam, *Creation in Crisis: Science, Ethics, Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014), 125–126. For more details about the link between climate change, extreme weather, and climate events, particularly with regards to precipitation, see K. Trenberth, "Changes in Precipitation with Climate Change," *Climate Research* 47:1–2 (2011): 123–138 and The Royal Society, *Climate Change: A Summary of the Science* (London: The Royal Society, 2010).

[33]There have been five mass extinctions already: at the end of the Ordovician era (nearly 439 million years ago or "mya"), the late Devonian extinction (nearly

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extinction surpasses natural rates. A majority of plant and animal species will not be able to keep up with the rate of climate change.[34] According to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, for example, humans have, "over the past few hundred years … increased species extinction rates by as much as 1,000 times the background rates that were typical over Earth's history."[35] The IPCC expresses "high confidence" that a large portion of plant and animal species faces bigger risks during and beyond the twenty-first century, especially because climate change interacts with other stressors.

Third, these threats to the biodiversity of our common home also compromise food security. Seafood, for example, is the primary source of protein and income for nearly one billion people, especially in many developing coastal nations. Citizens in countries like Bangladesh, Cambodia, Equatorial Guinea, Gambia, Ghana, and Indonesia get more than 50% of their protein from seafood. Yet the reduction and redistribution of marine resources in sensitive regions across the world will challenge the sustained provision of fisheries productivity and other ecological services. Climate change will also negatively affect wheat, rice, and maize production in certain parts of the world that fail to

364 mya), the Permian-Triassic extinction (nearly 251 mya), the End Triassic extinction (nearly 199–214 mya), and the Cretaceous-Tertiary boundary extinction (nearly 65 mya). For a detailed account of these extinctions, see D. Jablonski, "Extinctions in the Fossil Record," in J. Lawton & R. May, eds., *Extinction Rates* (Cambridge, MA: Oxford University Press, 1995), 25–44.

[34]IPCC, *Climate Change 2014 Synthesis Report*, 13. For more details about how global warming and associated climate change threaten biodiversity, see the following: Kureethadam, *Creation in Crisis*, 151–154 and chap. 5, "Species Extinction and Biodiversity Loss"; H. Hoag, "Confronting the Biodiversity Crisis," *Nature Reports: Climate Change* 4 (2010): 51–54; C. Rosenzweig et al., "Attributing Physical and Biological Impacts to Anthropogenic Climate Change," *Nature* 453 (2008): 353–357; and T. Dawson et al., "Beyond Predictions: Biodiversity Conservation in a Changing Climate," *Science* 332:6025 (2011): 53–58.

[35]Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, *Ecosystems and Human Well-being: Biodiversity Synthesis* (Washington, DC: World Resources Institute, 2005), 21.

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adapt.[36] An increase in temperature by even just two degrees Celsius, for instance, could reduce cereal production yields mostly in Asia and Africa by 20% to 40%.[37] The IPCC also notably expresses, with "robust evidence" and "high agreement," that climate change is foreseen to reduce renewable surface water and groundwater resources in most of the world's dry subtropical regions.[38] Combined with increasing food demand, these and other factors pose great risks to food security.

Lastly, the IPCC points out with "very high confidence" that anthropogenic global warming and climate change also endanger human health primarily by aggravating already existing health problems. A particular threat comes from the increased frequency of heat waves. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) warns in its 2016 Human Development Report (HDR) that climate change is expected to cause an additional 250,000 deaths per year due to malaria, diarrhea, heat stress, and malnutrition.[39] Global warming and associated climate change also increase risks from heat stress, air pollution, drought, and water scarcity in urban environments while impacting more on food security in rural areas. Yet regardless of where they occur, whether in urban or rural settings, the effects of anthropogenic global warming and climate change are greater for developing countries with low income

[36]See S. Cooley, H. Kite-Powell, & S. Doney, "Ocean Acidification's Potential to Alter Global Marine Ecosystem Services," *Oceanography* 22:4 (2009): 172–181.

[37]U. Lele, "Food Security for a Billion Poor," *Science* 327:5973 (2010): 1554.

[38]IPCC, *Climate Change 2014 Synthesis Report*, 13. For more details about the link between climate change and food security, consult the following: Kureethadam, *Creation in Crisis*, 150–151 and 222–234; B. Hare, "Relationship Between Increases in Global Mean Temperature and Impacts on Ecosystems, Food Production, Water and Socio-Economic Systems," in H.-J. Schellnhuber et al., eds., *Avoiding Dangerous Climate Change* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 177–187; and D. Lobell et al., "Prioritizing Climate Change Adaptation Needs for Food Security in 2030," *Science* 319:5863 (2008): 607–610.

[39]UNDP [United Nations Development Programme], *Human Development Report 2016: Human Development for Everyone* (New York: UNDP, 2016), 39.

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and for those who lack essential infrastructure and services or live in exposed areas.[40]

Continued anthropogenic emission of GHGs is also projected to further advance warming and long-lasting changes in all the components of our common home's climate system. In fact, global warming and associated climate change will not only continue to intensify already existing risks but also create new ones for both natural and human systems. The IPCC and other sources stress, moreover, that such risks and impacts are unevenly distributed—they are generally greater for disadvantaged peoples and communities irrespective of their countries' levels of development.[41]

The same disproportionate effects of environmental degradation can also be seen in the Philippines. A study by Marife M. Ballesteros of the Philippine Institute for Developmental Studies on the link between poverty and the environment in slum areas of the cities[42] is a case in point. About 37% (or over four million) of the population in Metro Manila lived in slums as of 2010, with an annual population growth rate of eight percent. With deleterious living conditions that negatively

[40]IPCC, *Climate Change 2014 Synthesis Report*, 15–16. For further details, refer to the following: Kureethadam, *Creation in Crisis*, 236–242; A. McMichael & E. Lindgren, "Climate Change: Present and Future Risks to Health, and Necessary Responses," *Journal of Internal Medicine* 270:5 (2011): 401–413; and A. Costello et al., "Managing the Health Effects of Climate Change," *Lancet* 373:9676 (2009): 1693–1733.

[41]IPCC, *Climate Change 2014 Synthesis Report*, 13, 69, and 72. For more details, refer to the previous chapter, specifically pp. 57–60. The following sources also make the same conclusion: UNDP, *Human Development Report 2016*, 15, 29, and 39; U. Srinivasan et al., "The Debt of Nations and the Distribution of Ecological Impacts from Human Activities," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 105:5 (2008): 1768–1773; and Caritas Internationalis, *Climate Justice: Seeking a Global Ethic* (Vatican City: Caritas Internationalis General Secretariat, 2009).

[42]M. Ballesteros, *Linking Poverty and the Environment: Evidence from Slums in Philippine Cities*, Philippine Institute for Development Studies Discussion Paper Series No. 2010-33 (Makati City, Philippines: Philippine Institute for Development Studies, 2010).

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impact health, livelihood, and social fiber, slum dwellers face not only economic but also environmental poverty. While everyone shares in the effects of urban environmental problems and climate change, it is the slum dwellers who suffer the most because of their hazardous locations, poor air and water quality, weak solid waste and disaster risk management, congestion, flooding, and weak to nonexistent implementation of environmental laws. These are more prevalent in slum areas around dumpsites (e.g., Pier 18 in Manila and Payatas in Quezon City), floodways (e.g., Manggahan), coasts (e.g., Baseco compound in Manila City), and roads or highways (e.g., National Government Center Eastside Development Project in Quezon City). Adverse living conditions further deepen poverty in these slum areas, increasing the vulnerability of those living in them and making socio-economic growth difficult.[43]

Towards an Ecologically-Sensitive Consistent Ethic of Life

From this brief look at a major manifestation of the modern ecological crisis, we can elicit at least three reasons why the CEL should pay attention to the predicament of our common home. First, the ruin of our common home undermines the integrity not only of non-human creation—which is God's work and has intrinsic value (LS nos. 68 and 140)—but also of human life. As we have seen, the modern ecological crisis not only threatens human life, particularly its quality, but also takes a heavy toll on it in extreme cases. Indeed, while ecological disasters may not be as frequent and direct as abortion, euthanasia, and capital punishment, they can be, in due course, not only life-threatening but also fatal. Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence" is particularly important for understanding the effects of this crisis, for we should not underestimate the harmful impacts of human actions on our common home just because they are slower in physical manifestation and less

[43]For more details, particularly statistical data, see Ballesteros, *Linking Poverty and the Environment*, 10–26.

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spectacular than other forms of violence. Such far-reaching effects that extend even to the unborn should make us consider seriously this crisis of our common home and how to deal with it.[44]

Second, the gradual destruction of our common home reveals a profoundly moral dimension particularly in terms of justice and equality. The contemporary ecological crisis is unjust chiefly because it is caused by the actions of a few—namely, more affluent and developed societies—while disproportionately harming the poor and the vulnerable who have contributed the least to it.[45] For these latter folk, who live in polluted locations close to industrial areas and in neighborhoods with poor water service and sanitation, the effects of the contemporary ecological crisis are no longer just theoretical but already a daily reality.[46]

Wealthy countries and peoples, moreover, have the capacity to "climate proof" themselves to a certain extent. The poor and the vulnerable are thus more affected precisely because they have fewer means to protect themselves and have no insurance for restoration when the effects of the modern ecological crisis strike them, whether in the form of natural calamities, food security, or diseases.[47] Indeed, as Gustavo Gutiérrez points out, the link between poverty and human life can be seen through the negation of the latter, namely, death. He holds that "poverty means death, both physical death that is early and unjust, due to [the] lack of the most basic necessities for life, and cultural death, as expressed in oppression and discrimination for reasons of

[44]R. Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 2.

[45]Kureethadam, *Creation in Crisis*, 254–260.

[46]Caritas Internationalis, *Climate Justice*, 6; H. Kempf, *How the Rich are Destroying the Earth* (Devon: Green Books, 2008), 41.

[47]Kureethadam identifies *geography* and *economy* as the primary factors in the disproportionate impacts of the modern ecological crisis on the poor and vulnerable. For more details, see *Creation in Crisis*, 259–260.

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race, culture, or gender."[48] Theologically speaking, moreover, poverty means the negation of creation's significance for it is against the will of God, the Creator of life. To speak theologically of poverty is not to deny its economic and social aspects; it is to grasp its "cruel and deep meaning: its radical rejection of life, the gift of God, as this life is manifested in the narrative of creation."[49]

The irony, however, is that the poor and vulnerable have contributed the least to the crisis of our common home. To give a historical example, fossil fuel energy and advances in technology have contributed greatly to human development as well as to the improvement of health and survival. Nevertheless, these benefits have been restricted chiefly to rich countries while poorer nations bear the brunt of adverse effects that result from emissions.[50] In the words of Joshtrom Kureethadam, which fittingly summarize the moral and ethical dimensions of the crisis of our common home, "the great ethical tragedy about the contemporary ecological crisis is that a large majority of the members of our common household suffer and will suffer due to the greedy actions of a minority."[51]

Lastly, the modern ecological crisis also embodies one of the "global prescientific convictions" that the CEL should address according to Richard A. McCormick, S.J., namely, an interventionist mentality.[52] This

[48]G. Gutiérrez, "Memory and Prophecy," in D. Groody, ed., *The Option for the Poor in Christian Theology* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 27.

[49]Gutiérrez, "Memory and Prophecy," 28.

[50]Kureethadam, *Creation in Crisis*, 258.

[51]Kureethadam, *Creation in Crisis*, 260.

[52]By "global prescientific convictions," McCormick refers to "unexamined assumptions, mostly cultural in character," that both dim the centrality of the human person in Catholic teaching and affect moral deliberative processes. McCormick identifies six such convictions that the CEL must address to have a firm historical and theological foundation, namely: the inconsistent application of physicalism in sexual ethics, bioethics, and social ethics; sexism; theological anthropomorphism; the dominance of independence in Western (and especially

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refers to the biased belief, particularly of highly technological societies, that human interventions are genuine solutions to problems. Greater technological interventions, such as "geoengineering"[53] for example, are being advanced and deemed to be the solutions to our environmental problems, and yet without recognizing how such interventions gave rise to these problems in the first place.[54] Such technological solutions tend to miss the larger picture and fail to acknowledge the deeper roots of the crisis of our common home.[55]

To be sure, this is not to vilify technology which has undoubtedly benefited humanity and our common home in many ways; rather, it is to recognize the link between this crisis and how we view and use technology. In acknowledging this connection, we return to one of the driving forces behind the CEL, namely, Bernardin's concern about how technology threatens life in new ways and scales. As discussed

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American) thought; an interventionist mentality; and rampant individualism. For more details, see R. McCormick, "The Consistent Ethic of Life: Is There an Historical Soft Underbelly?" in T. Fuechtmann, ed., *Consistent Ethic of Life* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1988), 104–109.

[53]The Royal Society defines geoengineering as the "deliberate large-scale manipulation of the planetary environment to counteract anthropogenic climate change" (The Royal Society, *Geoengineering the Climate: Science, Governance, and Uncertainty* [London: The Royal Society, 2009], 1). Two highly controversial proposals are made in this field specifically to address climate change: first, to spray aerosols into the atmosphere in an attempt to reflect the sun's rays back into space, and, second, to dump iron particles into the oceans to increase their ability to absorb carbon.

[54]McCormick, "The Consistent Ethic of Life: Is There an Historical Soft Underbelly?" 107–108.

[55]See S. Baum, T. Maher, Jr., & J. Haqq-Misra, "Double Catastrophe: Intermittent Stratospheric Geoengineering Induced by Societal Collapse," *Environment Systems & Decisions* 33:1 (2013): 168–180; H. Buck, "Geoengineering: Re-making Climate for Profit or Humanitarian Intervention?" *Development and Change* 43:1 (2012): 253–270; T. Sikka, "Geoengineering in a World Risk Society," *International Journal of Climate Change: Impacts & Responses* 3:1 (2012): 143–153; and T. Svoboda, "Aerosol Geoengineering Deployment and Fairness," *Environmental Values* 25:1 (2016): 51–68.

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earlier, one of the reasons why he pushed a CEL was because of how advancements in warfare technology threatened life on a previously unimaginable scale.[56] Thus, if it is to remain true to its claim that context shapes the content of this ethic and that modern technology prompts a sharper awareness of the fragility of human life, the CEL must pay attention to the crisis of our common home, especially since it threatens life in new ways and to various extents, and is related to our view and use of technology.

How the crisis of our common home harms both natural and human systems, how its effects are borne disproportionately by the poor and the vulnerable who have contributed the least to it, and how it is connected to our view and use of technology—all serve as compelling reasons for the CEL to pay attention to the destruction of our world. Our actions contributed to this crisis; consequently, it is our actions too—or lack of them—that will become decisive for the fate of our common home. If the crisis of our world severely affects human life, then it is not just our attitude but also our personal and social commitment toward human life itself that will be crucial.

Francis's Call for an Integral Ecology as a Dialogue Partner for a Reframed Consistent Ethic of Life

"Everything is connected" serves as the refrain of *Laudato Si'*. It reflects the encyclical's core vision, the heart of integral ecology, and Francis's greatest contribution to Catholic social teaching on our common home.[57] The pope devotes the entirety of chapter four of

[56]Bernardin, "A Consistent Ethic of Life: An American Catholic Dialogue." See also Bernardin, "A Consistent Ethic of Life: Continuing the Dialogue"; Bernardin, "An Update on the Consistent Ethic of Life"; and Bernardin, "The Consistent Ethic of Life," 264–266.

[57]K. Irwin, *A Commentary on Laudato Si': Examining the Background, Contributions, Implementation, and Future of Pope Francis's Encyclical* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2016), 117.

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his encyclical to integral ecology even though references to it can be found throughout *Laudato Si'*. In what follows, we will draw the major points of chapter four that are relevant for the purposes of this essay.

The pope begins his treatment of integral ecology, which Vincent J. Miller considers to be Francis's positive response to the global ecological crisis,[58] by noting that the problems of today call for an approach that is capable of respecting every aspect of the problem in light of the fact that everything is closely interconnected. Integral ecology is a vision that takes into consideration both the human and social dimensions of the global crisis that we face (LS no. 137). It is a comprehensive vision, founded on a holistic understanding of the Creation accounts in the book of Genesis (LS no. 66), one that sees human life as grounded in three fundamental and closely entwined relationships: our relationship with God, our neighbor, and the rest of creation. The harmony between these three vital relationships, however, had been broken by sin, both externally and internally, when humanity presumed to take the place of God and refused to acknowledge creaturely limitations. This rupture in our relationship with God, in turn, disfigured not only our reception of God's mandate to "have dominion" (Gen. 1:28) over and "till and keep" (Gen. 2:15) the earth but also our relationship with our neighbors. Truly, genuine care for our own lives as well as fraternity, justice, and faithfulness to those around us are inseparable from our relationships with the natural world (LS no. 66).

Grounded in such a theological anthropology, integral ecology insists that "nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it" (LS no. 139). Francis asserts, furthermore, that creation has an intrinsic value independent of its usefulness to human beings (cf. LS nos. 33, 83–84, and 140).

Such a vision calls for a recognition of the complexity of the crises facing our common home. These are not merely environmental; indeed,

[58]V. Miller, "Integral Ecology: Francis's Moral and Spiritual Vision of Interconnectedness," in *The Theological and Ecological Vision of Laudato Si'*, 12.

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to recognize "the reasons why a given area is polluted requires a study of the workings of society, its economy, its behaviour patterns, and the ways it grasps reality" (LS no. 139). Approaching the ecological crisis in this manner means that solutions must be comprehensive; they must account for interactions within natural systems as well as between natural, social, human, and cultural systems precisely because of the complexity of the problems that we face. The words of Francis aptly summarize his vision of integral ecology:

> We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature. (LS no. 139)

By the same token, human and natural environments deteriorate together and this affects the most vulnerable people on the planet (LS no. 48). An integral ecology thus insists on the inseparability of caring for both our natural environment and the poor. Francis, in fact, adamant as he is in his appeal to protect nature, is more resolute in his call to protect human life and the dignity of the human person:

> A sense of deep communion with the rest of nature cannot be real if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings. It is clearly inconsistent to combat trafficking in endangered species while remaining completely indifferent to human trafficking, unconcerned about the poor, or undertaking to destroy another human being deemed unwanted. This compromises the very meaning of our struggle for the sake of the environment. (LS no. 91)

We cannot withdraw from our duty to care for our neighbors, especially the most vulnerable. There can be no renewal of our relationship with the environment if we do not heal our relationship with each other. We cannot combat environmental degradation effectively without attending to causes related to social and human degradation. Francis reminds us that "there can be no ecology without an adequate anthropology" (LS no. 118).

The pope's call for an integral ecology is thus an ideal and crucial dialogue partner in the effort to reframe the CEL in light of the crisis

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of our common home. To begin with, there are similarities between Francis and Bernardin, particularly in the way they understand what being "pro-life" means; in this case, they both refuse to limit it to being simply "anti-abortion."[59] This is apparent in Francis's interview with Antonio Spadaro, S.J., where he pointed out that

> we cannot insist only on issues related to abortion, gay marriage, and the use of contraceptive methods. This is not possible. I have not spoken much about these things, and I was reprimanded for that. But when we speak about these issues, we have to talk about them in a context.[60]

He insists by the same token, in his apostolic exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*, that while our defense of unborn life must be "clear, firm and passionate," we cannot in many ways ignore those already born, especially the poor and the vulnerable, because their lives are "equally sacred."[61] Francis is not dismissing the importance of concerns like abortion; instead, he is calling for the Church to see these in a broader context and to see beyond a handful of life issues. In doing so, the Church can explain better its overall understanding of the human person and make its witness to life more credible.[62]

Bernardin, like Francis, also refuses to limit the meaning of pro-life to being concerned with only a handful of issues. He espouses a similarly broad and inclusive vision that "identifies both the protection of life and its promotion as moral questions."[63] Archbishop Michael Sheehan of Santa Fe, New Mexico captures in an apt manner the correspondence between Bernardin and Francis: "The point that

[59]K. Mannara, "Bernardin and Bergoglio: What the Cardinal's Legacy Offers to a Church Led by Pope Francis," *New Theology Review* 28:2 (2016): 41.

[60]A. Spadaro, "A Big Heart Open to God: An Interview with Pope Francis," *America* (September 30, 2013).

[61]Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate* [Apostolic Exhortation on the Call to Holiness in Today's World] (March 19, 2018), nos. 101–102.

[62]Mannara, "Bernardin and Bergoglio," 40 and 43.

[63]Bernardin, "A Consistent Ethic of Life: Continuing the Dialogue," 16.

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[Bernardin's] consistent ethic makes is exactly the same point that Pope Francis is making—let's look at the whole picture and not just focus almost exclusively on three or so issues."[64]

There are also similarities between the CEL and integral ecology. We can gather that both visions strive to be broad, inclusive, comprehensive, and insistent on interconnections even as they differ in their respective foci. CEL, on the one hand, insists on a link between abortion and other issues concerning human life. The way individuals and groups pursue one or several issues should thus support a systemic vision of life.[65] Integral ecology, on the other hand, maintains that the "cry of the earth" and the "cry of the poor" are inseparable (LS no. 49). Both visions resist an *ad hoc* approach to the different issues that they seek to address; indeed, and more to the point, both visions seek *consistency* in the way we—as individuals, as a society, and as a Church—deal with different problems. For Bernardin, it is inconsistent to work for the protection of the unborn and yet remain unconcerned about the threat of war, the lives of inmates on death rows, and the poor, or vice versa.[66] For Francis, it is inconsistent to care for our common home while remaining indifferent to the plight of human beings, especially the poor, or the other way around (LS no. 91).

Integral ecology serves as a crucial dialogue partner for a reframed CEL in several ways. We can reckon that the CEL, as a moral vision, is still narrow in some respects and upon closer scrutiny, given its limited horizon. In his CEL, Bernardin appears inclined to restrict his attention to "classical life issues" such as nuclear war, abortion, euthanasia, and capital punishment. Abortion, in particular, takes up a specifically important and recurrent place in his works.[67] Although

[64]Quoted in D. Gibson, "Pope Francis Breathes New Life into Bernardin's Contested Legacy," *National Catholic Reporter* (October 26, 2013).

[65]Bernardin, "A Consistent Ethic of Life: Continuing the Dialogue," 17.

[66]Bernardin, "A Consistent Ethic of Life: An American Catholic Dialogue," 13.

[67]See A. Spilly, ed., *Selected Works of Joseph Cardinal Bernardin* Vol. 1: *Homilies and Teaching Documents* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000) and A. Spilly, ed.,

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the Cardinal discusses other concerns that affect human life, such as health care and poverty, these receive relatively less attention compared to the abovementioned issues.[68] Thus, in limiting itself to "classical" concerns, Bernardin's CEL fails to give adequate attention to other issues that affect human life, whether the right to it or its quality, such as ecological issues and HIV/AIDS. In contrast to Bernardin's CEL, Ronald J. Sider's biblically-founded and completely pro-life stance seeks "fullness of life in *every* area" and embraces issues such as smoking, alcoholism, racism, and environmental destruction.[69]

Apropos of its claim and insistence that human, natural, social, and cultural ecologies are interconnected and inseparable, integral ecology can expand the moral vision of the CEL. Concern about human life and dignity must not be limited to "classical" bio- and social ethical issues, important as they are, especially if the signs of the times reveal new ways and magnitudes by which human life and dignity are threatened. Integral ecology, with its vision of the interconnectedness of everything, can stir us "to become painfully aware" of how the crisis of our common home harms not only non-human creation but also human life itself, "and thus to discover what each of us can do about it" (LS no. 19). Integral ecology, in other words, can further expand the CEL's vision so that the latter may break out from its limitation to "classical" life issues.

Moreover, apart from broadening the CEL's horizons, integral ecology's keener perception and articulation of the interconnections in

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Selected Works of Joseph Cardinal Bernardin Vol. 2: *Church and Society* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000) which are the only available compilations of the writings of Bernardin on the consistent ethic of life. Abortion and war are topics present in almost all of his work; he also dedicated at least two writings to the death penalty and four to euthanasia.

[68]In the abovementioned compilations, four writings were dedicated to health care and only one to poverty.

[69]See R. Sider, with the staff of Evangelicals for Social Action, *Completely Pro-Life: Building a Consistent Stance on Abortion, the Family, Nuclear Weapons, the Poor* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 189–196.

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the web of life can also give this ethic a stronger and more persuasive language for expounding on the links between life issues. As pointed out by Timothy A. Byrnes, one of the difficulties faced by the CEL is that there is specific, authoritative, and demanding Church teaching on abortion. As such, those who emphasize abortion over and above other issues are emboldened to relate their case to the public in ways that Bernardin and adherents of the CEL cannot.[70] With *Laudato Si'*, however, which Francis intends to be added to the body of the Church's social teachings (LS no. 15), there is now at least a clear point of reference for asserting the connectedness of all things.

Contributions of a Reframed Consistent Ethic of Life to Discourse on the Care for Our Common Home

The crisis of our common home is not just an environmental problem that threatens God's handiwork, which has an intrinsic value of its own. It is also a crisis that imperils human life itself. Indeed, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines considers this ecological crisis to be the "ultimate pro-life issue."[71] Protecting and promoting the life and dignity of the human person at every stage and in every circumstance entails safeguarding our common home as this is one of the conditions necessary for upholding and sustaining human life and dignity. Although Francis's call for an integral ecology shares many similarities with Bernardin's CEL, it challenges the Cardinal's ethic to expand its moral vision to include the protection of our world as a pro-life issue, both for its own sake and for the sake of human life.

This expanded horizon of the CEL, in turn, can make its contributions to our efforts in caring for our common home. First, this ethic can provide us with a moral vision that enables us to recognize

[70]T. Byrnes, "How 'Seamless' a Garment? The Catholic Bishops and the Politics of Abortion," *Journal of Church and State* 33:1 (1991): 18, 31–35.

[71]CBCP, "What is Happening to Our Beautiful Land?" 317.

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how caring for our world is an indispensable element of our systemic defense of life in every stage and circumstance. The value of a CEL is that it impels us to face the full range of threats against life. It resists a single-issue focus or an ad hoc approach to morality by the Church even if an issue like abortion is more urgent. As such, given how the crisis of our common home seriously threatens human life in terms of both its quality and the very right to it, the CEL can highlight this crisis as a pressing issue that touches on the dignity and quality of life today. It is an ethic that can sharpen our moral sensitivity and broaden our intellectual framework for debating issues that affect human life.[72]

Caring for our common home, then, is—and must be—a constitutive dimension of Christian discipleship, particularly of our duty to protect and promote the dignity of the human person, especially the poorest and most vulnerable. It is intimately connected with—indeed, inseparable from—our other efforts to defend human life.

Second, a reconfigured CEL can also provide the framework for Francis's appeal to observe and practice integral ecology consistently (LS no. 217). By closely linking care for the environment with our other endeavors to defend human life and dignity as well as promote a systemic vision of life, our attitude toward the world becomes inseparable from our stance toward human life. In other words, if we truly and passionately cherish human life in all its stages and circumstances, then we cannot neglect the state of our common home that sustains us. Earth, indeed, is our *only* home.[73] It can continue existing without us—as it has done for billions of years—but we cannot survive without it.[74] We are not just a part of nature; for better or worse, our very lives depend on it.

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[72]J. Bernardin, "Religion and Politics: The Future Agenda," *Origins* 14:21 (1984): 326–327.

[73]For a description of the Earth as a Goldilocks planet, i.e., "just right" for human and non-human beings to flourish in, see Kureethadam, *Creation in Crisis*, 15–33.

[74]For an account of the entry of human beings into the evolutionary history of the Earth, see Kureethadam, *Creation in Crisis*, 33–41 and D. Edwards, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 8–14.

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Along the same lines, those who care only about the environment with little or no regard for the plight of their neighbors and especially the most vulnerable are called upon to broaden their moral universe. It is inconsistent to lament the loss of biodiversity and the degradation of the natural environment while remaining nonchalant about human oppression (LS no. 91). This critique applies especially to conservation efforts that focus on the preservation of natural environments and species at the cost of displacing human populations, such as in some parts of Africa and the Amazon.[75] A reframed CEL, according to Bernardin's original vision, cuts both ways and exposes inconsistencies and narrow moral horizons of opposing camps.

An ecologically sensitive CEL can provide the moral vision and framework for articulating in a coherent manner the linkages between various ethical issues concerning the preservation and enhancement of human life in all its stages as well as of our common home, God's creation on which life itself depends. More to the point, however, this reframed ethic can serve as a moral guide toward a consistent living out of our duty to protect and promote life in light of the modern ecological crisis. It can help us achieve a "moral and spiritual wholeness" that embraces concern for human beings and the rest of God's creation[76] and helps us realize that Christian love is not a "rare fluid to be economized" but rather a "capacity which grows by use."[77]

[75]C. Iheka, "Pope Francis' Integral Ecology and Environmentalism for the Poor," *Environmental Ethics* 39:3 (2017): 250.

[76]R. Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals: An Invitation to Enlarge our Moral Universe* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), 13.

[77]M. Midgley, *Animals and Why They Matter* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1983), 119.

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