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A BUCKET HALF EMPTY

A Critique of the Notion of Sustainable Development as a Paradigm for Environmental Sustainability

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An awareness of the worsening state of the environment and of the adverse impacts of environmental problems on the global community and ecosystem has challenged world leaders in recent times to find a workable solution to the environmental crisis. In the wide-ranging environmental, socio-political, and economic discourse that followed, the idea of sustainable development has since emerged as the primary consideration.

Sustainable development was proposed at the Earth Summit[1] held in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil as the overarching philosophy of the concerted effort to address environmental degradation. The summit reflected a global consensus at the highest levels of government, along with an explicit recognition of the indispensable roles of various sectors of society in implementing sustainable development. World leaders adopted the principle of sustainable development found in *Our Common Future*,[2] the report of the World Commission on Environment and

[1]Pope Francis mentioned the importance of this summit in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*. See Francis, *Laudato Si'* [On Care for Our Common Home] (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015), no. 167.

[2]WCED [World Commission on Environment and Development], *Our Common Future* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 43–65.

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Development (WCED), also known as the Brundtland Commission, which expressed the need for intensive collaboration among nations in addressing the global environmental crisis. The report served as a blueprint and agenda for future action in tackling environmental issues.

Sustainable development, broadly speaking, encompasses three policy areas. The first is *economic growth*, which emphasizes the necessity of creating methods to sustain development based on sustained economic growth. The second, *social equality*, seeks to alleviate poverty and aims to address the inequitable distribution of wealth in society as well as the ever-growing gap between classes of peoples. The third, *environmental protection*, promotes the reconciliation of development with the regenerative capacity of the environment.[3]

The reconciliation of the goals of economic development and social stability with the environmental limits of our planet over the long term is the foundational principle of sustainable development. It is appealing indeed, purportedly offering the global community a new vision of economic growth and development that supposedly strikes a balance between economic goals, social needs, and environmental protection.

The concept of sustainable development, however, does not offer a change of paradigm in the development discourse. As clearly emphasized in *Our Common Future*, the task of sustainable development is to "make way for a new era of economic growth."[4] In other words, the new era will still be marked, like in most theories of development, by economic progress.

In this conversation, we argue that sustainable development is inadequate (if not inherently problematic) as a paradigm for environmental sustainability. Using Catholic social teaching as a tool for analysis, we contend that the concept is like a bucket half empty as its framework lacks the moral foundations necessary for a sustainable environment.

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[3]R. Goodland & G. Ledec, "Neoclassical Economics and Principles of Sustainable Development," in L. Pojman, ed., *Environmental Ethics: Readings in Theory and Application*, 3rd ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2001), 486–487.

[4]WCED, *Our Common Future*, 49.

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The Notion of Sustainable Development: A Short Historical Review

To understand how the concept of sustainable development came about, we have to go back to the year 1962 when Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* was first published. Many considered the book's release as the starting point of the global community's heightened awareness of the extent of the environmental crisis and the turning point in our understanding of the interconnections between the environment, the economy, and social well-being. Research in the fields of epidemiology, ecology, and toxicology had confirmed that agricultural pesticides were destroying ecosystems rapidly, resulting in widespread damage not only to different organisms but to human health as well.[5]

A conference spearheaded by UNESCO, the Intergovernmental Conference for Rational Use and Conservation of the Biosphere, was then organized in 1968, in which the concept of sustainable development emerged during the deliberations. In that same year, Paul Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb* was published in which he argued for and established the interplay between the environment, resource exploitation, and human population.[6] An environmental group called Friends of the Earth was then organized in the following year; their focus was directed toward the prevention of environmental degradation, nurturance of biodiversity, and education of citizens on how to participate in decision-making processes concerning the environment. Then, in 1971, another environmental group was launched; called Greenpeace, it began an aggressive agenda to protect the environment by spearheading non-violent protests and interventions.[7]

The concept of sustainable development became a prominent item once again in the deliberations of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment held in 1972 in Stockholm, Sweden.

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[5]R. Carson, "Silent Spring," in Pojman, ed., *Environmental Ethics*, 409–417.

[6]P. Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb* (New York: Sierra Club/Ballantine Books, 1968).

[7]S. Dutch, ed., *Encyclopedia of Global Warming* Vol. 1 (Pasadena: Salem Press, 2010), 524.

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Significant in that year as well was the Club of Rome's publication of *The Limits to Growth*, in which they predicted dire consequences arising from the environmental problem if economic growth was not slowed down.[8] Usage of the phrase "sustainable development" then gained much wider acceptance later on with the publication in 1980 of *World Conservation Strategy: Living Resource Conservation for Sustainable Development* by the United Nations Environment Programme, the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, and the World Wildlife Fund.

In 1983, U.N. Secretary General Javier Felipe Ricardo Pérez de Cuéllar asked Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland to lead a United Nations commission that would tackle the ideas developed in Stockholm.[9] The commission, named the Brundtland Commission,[10] came up in 1987 with the report titled *Our Common Future*, which defines sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."[11]

The publication of *Our Common Future*, along with the work of the WCED, laid the groundwork for the convening of the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the consequent adoption of *Agenda 21* (prescriptions for implementing sustainable development),[12] the *Rio Declaration* (a commitment to put into practice the principles of

[8]D. Mebratu, "Sustainability and Sustainable Development: Historical and Conceptual Review," *Environmental Impact Assessment Review* 18:6 (1998): 501.

[9]The Stockholm conference was mandated by the United Nations to develop tools for environmental assessment and management in view of sustainable development. It was held in Stockholm, Sweden from June 5–16, 1972.

[10]Mebratu, "Sustainability and Sustainable Development," 501.

[11]WCED, *Our Common Future*, 43.

[12]United Nations, *Agenda 21* (Rio de Janeiro: United Nations Conference on Environment & Development, 1992).

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sustainable development),[13] and the establishment of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development.

Core Principles of Sustainable Development

The WCED's *Our Common Future* report formulated the following General Principles, Rights, and Responsibilities of States for the promotion of sustainable development and resolution of environmental disputes through peaceful settlement:

1. All human beings have the fundamental right to an environment adequate for their health and well being.[14]
2. States shall conserve and use the environment and natural resources for the benefit of present and future generations.
3. States shall maintain ecosystems and ecological processes essential for the functioning of the biosphere, shall preserve biological diversity, and shall observe the principle of optimum sustainable yield in the use of living natural resources and ecosystems.
4. States shall establish adequate environmental protection standards and monitor changes in and publish relevant data on environmental quality and resource use.
5. States shall make or require prior environmental assessments of proposed activities which may significantly affect the environment or use of a natural resource.
6. States shall inform in a timely manner all persons likely to be significantly affected by a planned activity and to grant them equal access and due process in administrative and judicial proceedings.

[13]United Nations, *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development* (Rio de Janeiro: United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, 1992).

[14]Francis in *Laudato Si'* recognized this as one of the most important principles mentioned in the *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development* (Principle 1). See Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 167.

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> 7. States shall ensure that conservation is treated as an integral part of the planning and implementation of development activities and provide assistance to other States, especially to developing countries, in support of environmental protection and sustainable development.
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> …
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> 22. States shall settle environmental disputes by peaceful means. If mutual agreement on a solution or on other dispute settlement arrangements is not reached within 18 months, the dispute shall be submitted to conciliation and, if unresolved thereafter, to arbitration or judicial settlement at the request of any of the concerned States.[15]

Taken together as a whole, these principles emphasize the rights of future generations to a healthy environment. They are also intertwined with the present protection of the earth's ecosystem, which is tied to the environmental problems facing humanity that involve interrelated issues like climate change, pollution, the deterioration and depletion of natural resources, and biotechnology, among others. These principles as such refer to the obligations of states to protect, preserve, and, insofar as possible, restore the health and integrity of ecosystems, thereby ensuring the proper functioning of essential ecological processes and life support systems while at the same time disseminating information on activities or measures that are likely to have environmental impact and involve other states in relevant decision-making processes.

Global partnership is therefore stressed as a fundamental requirement for achieving sustainable development. While the spirit of these principles recognizes that all states have the sovereign right to utilize their resources to meet their sustainable development needs as well as the responsibility to develop and implement a national plan for the protection and preservation of the environment within the levels of their national jurisdiction, they must ensure that activities within their jurisdiction or control do not cause potential or actual

[15]WCED, *Our Common Future*, 349–351. While there are other principles enumerated in the document, the aforementioned are considered to be the core principles for the purpose of this study.

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harm to the environment of other states or areas beyond the limits of their national jurisdiction.

As a framework, sustainable development covers a vast array of issues such as water quality, biodiversity, the revitalization of growth with sustainability, urbanization (issues concerning waste, pollution, etc.), deforestation and desertification, the management of chemicals and industrial wastes, legal disputes, the participation and responsibility of peoples, etc. What is immediately noticeable in the WCED report, however, is the strong emphasis on the importance of continuous economic growth.[16] Everything concerning the environment and its sustainability is predicated on economic growth framed within the context of the dominant economic system of neoliberalism[17] and

[16]WCED, *Our Common Future*, 49.

[17]Neoliberalism is a complicated idea. On a basic level, it is considered to be a paradigm for economic theory and policy-making where power and wealth are concentrated to an ever-increasing degree, as a result of the practical implementation of an economic and political ideology, within transnational corporations and the market. It is a revival of the economic theories of Adam Smith, who in 1776 argued in his famous book, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, that rational self-interest and competition can lead to economic prosperity. Smith developed "laissez-faire" economics in which there is only minimum governmental interference in the economic affairs of both individuals and society.

Neoliberalism has since become, up until the present time, the broad economic model around the world characterized by open markets and relatively barrier-free domestic and international trade. Its definition, however, is best given by David Harvey in his book *A Brief History of Neoliberalism.* He says:

> Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. The state has to guarantee, for example, the quality and integrity of money. It must also set up those military, defense, police and legal structures and functions required to secure private property rights and

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free-market capitalism, with the core principles clearly stressing that economic growth will direct policy toward a more efficient use of the environment and hence toward a more sustainable world economy. Furthermore, it does not provide a profound analysis of power despite the fact that decision-making processes are crucial in implementing sustainable development.

The Focus on Economic Growth: A Problematic Focal Point

It is rather puzzling that the notion of "development" has been attached to the concept of "sustainability."[18] By putting the two terms together, it is assumed that the vision of sustained economic growth is compatible with the "responsible" use of the environment for long-term ends. We have seen, however, that economic forces have stimulated the mass consumption of non-renewable resources which continues to create problems for the environment. The idea of

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> to guarantee, by force if need be, the proper functioning of markets. Furthermore, if markets do not exist, then they must be created, by state action, if necessary. But beyond these tasks the state should not venture. State interventions in markets (once created) must be kept to a bare minimum because, according to the theory, the state cannot possibly possess enough information to second-guess market signals (prices) and because powerful interest groups will inevitably distort and bias state interventions (particularly in democracies) for their own benefit. (D. Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005], 2)

See also E. Arndt, "Neuliberalismus und Wirklichkeit—Neue Wege und alte Dogmen," *Gewerkschaftlicher Monatshefte* 5 (1954): 137–142; J. Waldron, "Theoretical Foundations of Liberalism," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 37:147 (1987): 127–150.

[18]H. Daly commented that sustainable development as a concept is an oxymoron. He argues that the pervading notion of development in contemporary times is incompatible with sustainability. Cf. H. Daly, *Beyond Growth: The Economics of Sustainable Development* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996), 8.

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sustainable development, to say the least, is a dubious one, an attempt to justify the continuation of a way of life that has led to the present environmental crisis.

Economic growth, considered intrinsic to the quest for sustainable development, necessarily involves environmental degradation. All materials, both renewable and non-renewable, are in finite supply, and yet the emphasis on economic growth promotes a "high standard of living" which entails excessive resource consumption. It is, quite literally, costing the environment—every second that an electric light or appliance is kept on contributes to environmental degradation. Unbridled economic growth and the maintenance of a high standard of living as exemplified especially in Western culture are irreconcilable with the preservation of the existing ecosystem.

The preoccupation with economic growth and the pursuit of financial gain also relegate human persons and the environment to being mere factors of production and profit. The framework of sustainable development is thus morally flawed. Reducing human persons and the environment to means to an end, to accumulate profit, is a serious moral issue. The search for profit, therefore, should not be the primary pursuit or ultimate goal.

Development as Integral Human Development

Taking into consideration Catholic social teaching, from *Rerum Novarum* to the recent social encyclicals,[19] the Church has always emphasized Christian values—such as respect for the dignity of the human person, equality in the social order, the promotion of human rights and social justice, and the protection of the common good especially with regards to the environment—over and above economic development and material gain.

[19]G. Baum, "An Ethical Critique of Capitalism: Contributions of Modern Catholic Social Teaching," in C. Curran & R. McCormick, eds., *John Paul II and Moral Theology*, Readings in Moral Theology No. 10 (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 245.

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Catholic social teaching introduced the important idea of "integral human development," which calls into question the equation of development with the maximization of economic growth. In fact, as Catholic social teaching contends, attempting to maximize economic growth alone may undermine other central elements of authentic human flourishing. Development should instead seek to foster the well-being of the entire human person. It is a broader or more integral understanding of development that requires attention be given to all aspects of human life.

Integral human development promotes the good not only of every person but also of the *whole* person in the moral, cultural, economic, political, social, and spiritual spheres. This idea was introduced in Pope Paul VI's 1967 encyclical *Populorum Progressio:*

> The development we speak of here cannot be restricted to economic growth alone. To be authentic, it must be well rounded; it must foster the development of each person and of the whole person.[20]

The anthropological locus of integral human development according to Catholic social teaching is thereby incompatible with sustainable development's focus on economic progress where material gain and profit are the main driving forces. In Catholic social teaching, the welfare of the human person takes precedence over economic development alone. This is why it consistently defends "every person and … the whole person" from any threat of dehumanization and injustice.

Catholic Social Teaching

In order to understand Catholic social teaching better on this particular point, we expound briefly on each social encyclical's core ideas on development. These encyclicals are presented here in chronological order to show the gradual evolution of the concept of

[20]Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio* [On the Development of Peoples] (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1967), no. 14.

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"integral human development" and how it has been shaped by the context in which these encyclicals were issued.

1. Rerum Novarum

Although the idea of integral human development was not mentioned in it, Catholic social teaching's promotion of the good of "every person and of the whole person" is generally viewed to have begun with Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. It contained important ideas and themes that would provide the foundation for the Catholic Church's approach to modern social issues,[21] and has therefore received a highly exalted status in Catholic social teaching as a consequence of its groundbreaking content. Pope John XXIII, for example, asserted that *Rerum Novarum* painstakingly outlined the fundamental principles of Catholic social teaching; he wrote: "Here for the first time was a complete synthesis of social principles, formulated with such historical insight as to be of permanent value to Christendom. It is rightly regarded as a compendium of Catholic social and economic teaching."[22]

The encyclical strongly criticized the undesirable conditions of workers in the industrial communities. Leo XIII argued that there are three key factors underlying economic life: "workers, productive property and the state."[23] While personal morality and the teachings of the Church were for him the keys to solving social problems, he was also aware at the same time that there may be situations in which the teachings of the Church would not be heeded. In these cases, he said, the state has a duty to intervene to protect the common good.

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[21]The modern tradition of papal encyclicals was begun by Pope Benedict XIV in 1740. For an overview of the major themes of the pre-Leonine encyclicals, see M. Schuck, *That They Be One: The Social Teaching of the Papal Encyclicals 1740–1989* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1991).

[22]John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra* [On Christianity and Social Progress] (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1961), no. 15.

[23]P. Henriot, E. DeBerri, & M. Schultheis, *Catholic Social Teaching: Our Best Kept Secret* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1987), 7.

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Rejecting the *laissez-faire* attitude prominent at the time, Leo XIII argued that "whenever the general interest or any particular class suffers, or is threatened with harm, which can in no other way be met or prevented, the public authority must step in to deal with it."[24] He said, above all, that the state has an obligation to protect the rights of the poor and of workers:

> Rights must be religiously respected wherever they exist, and it is the duty of the public authority to prevent and to punish injury, and to protect every one in the possession of [their] own. Still, when there is question of defending the rights of individuals, the poor and badly off have a claim to especial consideration. The richer class have many ways of shielding themselves, and stand less in need of help from the State; whereas the mass of the poor have no resources of their own to fall back upon, and must chiefly depend upon the assistance of the State. And it is for this reason that wage-earners, since they mostly belong in the mass of the needy, should be specially cared for and protected by the government.[25]

In its defense of workers and affirmation of an important (but limited) role of the state in economic life, *Rerum Novarum* provided key themes that would later become foundational for Catholic social teaching and have great impact on subsequent ecclesial reflections on development.

2. Quadragesimo Anno

This encyclical, issued in 1931 by Pope Pius XI in commemoration of the 40th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, was concerned mainly with workers' conditions in the modern industrial societies of Western Europe and North America. Much of *Quadragesimo Anno* consisted of a reaffirmation of the teachings of *Rerum Novarum;* highlighted especially were the rights of workers, the duty of the state to protect

[24]Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum* [On Capital and Labor] (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1891), no. 36.

[25]Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, no. 37.

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the poor, and the serious flaws of both socialism and then-existing forms of capitalism.

Several new or heightened emphases, however, were also present in Pius XI's encyclical. Writing in response to the alarming concentration of wealth and power in the socio-economic realm, for example, Pius XI called for the reestablishment of a social order based on the principle of subsidiarity, which placed responsibility as close as possible to the people.[26] Those who form associations and who are most directly affected by the decisions or policies of their companies should have an important role in the decision-making process, and should be interfered with only to support them in their needs and help coordinate their activities with those of the rest of society, all with a view toward fostering the common good. Thus, even though Pius XI placed a strong emphasis on social harmony, he nonetheless affirmed a stronger role for workers' associations in actively defending workers' rights. He spoke of these associations as a means of self-protection against oppression by the more powerful.

Pius XI also argued that socialism is fundamentally flawed because, "wholly ignoring and indifferent to [the] sublime end of both [human persons] and society, [it] affirms that human association has been instituted for the sake of material advantage alone."[27] Socialists fail to recognize the natural orientation of human persons toward God. At the same time, he contended that unrestrained capitalism has led to economic dictatorship, creating a situation in which immense power and despotic economic domination is concentrated in the hands of a few while the multitudes suffer. Unregulated competition, he said, permits the survival only of those who are the strongest. This also means that those who fight most relentlessly are often those who heed the dictates of conscience. Pius XI thereby suggested a genuine and sincere return to the teaching of the Gospel as a solution to social ills.

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[26]Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno* [On Reconstruction of the Social Order] (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1931), no. 80.

[27]Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, no. 118.

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3. Mater et Magistra

John XXIII, in his encyclical *Mater et Magistra* (1961), reflected on the changes that had taken place in the world since the issuance of *Quadragesimo Anno* thirty years earlier. He focused especially on the industrialized nations, highlighting the rapid development of science and technology, increased availability of consumer goods, and creation of the social welfare state in some nations. Reflecting on the rising faith in Keynesian[28] economic ideas in the industrialized world, John XXIII asserted that what was happening provided additional reasons for why it is within the power of public authorities, to a greater extent than ever before, to reduce imbalances, keep fluctuations in the economy within bounds, and provide effective measures for avoiding mass unemployment. He demanded those in authority "to increase the degree and scope of their activities in the economic sphere, and to devise ways and means and set the necessary machinery in motion for the attainment of this end."[29] Where appropriate activity of the state is lacking or defective, John XXIII argued, commonwealths are apt

[28]John Maynard Keynes was a British economist whose ideas fundamentally affected the theory and practice of modern economics. Widely considered to be the most influential economist of the 20th century, he built on and greatly refined his earlier work on the causes of business cycles, and his ideas are the basis for the school of thought known as Keynesian economics, along with its various offshoots. In the 1930s, he spearheaded a revolution in economic thinking, overturning the older ideas of neoclassical economics which held that free markets would automatically provide full employment over the short to medium term as long as workers were flexible in their wage demands. He was also credited with demolishing old notions such as "that wage earners were maximizers" or "that unemployment was voluntary," and advocated the use of fiscal and monetary measures to mitigate the adverse effects of economic recessions and depressions. Keynes's ideas concerning economic policy were adopted by leading Western economies following the outbreak of World War II, and while Keynes himself died in 1946, the success of Keynesian economics during the 1950s and 1960s resulted in almost all capitalist governments adopting its policy recommendations. Cf. J. Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money* (San Diego: A Harvest Book, 1964), 27–56.

[29]John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, no. 54.

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to experience incurable disorders and the exploitation of the weak by the unscrupulous strong.

John XXIII also strongly pointed out that workers should always be treated with dignity. It would still be unjust for the human dignity of workers to be compromised even if an economic order is able to produce vast amounts of goods and distribute such in conformity with the norms of justice and equity. What is ultimately important, John XXIII emphasized, is the fostering of spiritual and moral values; otherwise, human ingenuity will foster destruction instead of the enhancement of human dignity.

4. Pacem in Terris

The central theme of *Pacem in Terris*, the encyclical issued by John XXIII in 1963, was an appeal to respect the common good, along with an array of social, economic, political, and religious rights and corresponding obligations that were viewed as the basis of world peace. John XXIII emphasized the fundamental importance of social and economic rights, including the right to food, shelter, medical care, and necessary social services.[30] All these rights, he said, are grounded in the God-given dignity and social nature of the human person and that at their core is the right to employment with decent working conditions and a just wage. Indeed, John XXIII even stressed that society and state must guarantee that the basic needs of persons are met even if they are unable to work.

John XXIII, furthermore, vigorously warned about the abuses that accompanied aid given by highly industrialized nations to poor countries as this strongly promoted the idea of economic development at the expense of human, religious, and cultural values. He wrote:

> Truth further demands an attitude of unruffled impartiality in the use of the many aids to the promotion and spread of mutual understanding between nations which modern scientific progress has made available. This does not mean that people should be prevented from drawing

[30]John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris* [On Establishing Universal Peace in Truth, Justice, Charity, and Liberty] (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1963), no. 11.

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> particular attention to the virtues of their own way of life, but it does mean the utter rejection of ways of disseminating information which violate the principles of truth and justice, and injure the reputation of another nation.[31]

It can never be repeated sufficiently, he asserted, that aid must be given with the greatest respect for the liberty of the countries being developed, with respect for the moral and ethnic characteristics peculiar to each, and without any intention of political domination.

5. Gaudium et Spes

The Second Vatican Council issued *Gaudium et Spes* in 1965 and took up the task of "scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel."[32] This document shared many of the major themes of John XXIII's social encyclicals; areas of overlap, for example, include similar understandings of the innate dignity and social nature of the human person and of the important role of the state in overseeing and managing modern economic life. While the document expressed a generally optimistic view of the potential contribution of "progress" based on advances in science and technology, it considered development in critical terms[33] and warned against materialistic consumerism and the neglect of the spiritual and social dimensions of life.[34]

Gaudium et Spes was critical as well in its assessment of the international economic order. It argued that numerous reforms of the global economy were needed, and that the primary purpose of such should be to remove as quickly as possible the immense economic

[31]John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, no. 90.

[32]Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes* [Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World] (Vatican City: 1965), no. 4.

[33]*Gaudium et Spes*, nos. 64–66.

[34]*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 66.

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inequalities that existed not only between countries but also between regions and groups within countries:

> To satisfy the demands of justice and equity, strenuous efforts must be made … to remove as quickly as possible the immense economic inequalities, which now exist and in many cases are growing and which are connected with individual and social discrimination.[35]

The document was clear in its serious assessment of the global economy. It placed a heightened emphasis on equality and stressed that the goods of creation are intended by God to be shared equitably by all. It also began a deeper exploration of the far-reaching practical implications of this principle of the "universal destination of created goods,"[36] which it stated places limits on the right to private property. This has implications for lifestyle choices, particularly as the Council argued that all persons have the responsibility to meet the needs of the poor by sharing not only from one's superfluous wealth but also in ways that would require a simplification of one's lifestyle.

6. Populorum Progressio

While Paul VI's 1967 encyclical *Populorum Progressio* introduced the concept of "integral human development" as a critique of the notion of development[37] prevailing at that time, the notion itself was derived in large part from the pioneering thought of French economist

[35]*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 66.

[36]*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 69.

[37]The economist Barbara Ward notes that development economists in the 1960s had been blinded by the euphoria of economic growth and uncritical optimism concerning modernization and the workings of capitalism. What resulted from that kind of development became more painfully clear: worsened conditions for many of the poor, social upheaval, ecological damage, etc. Cf. B. Ward, "Looking Back on *Populorum Progressio*," in R. McCormick & C. Curran, eds., *Official Catholic Social Teaching*, Readings in Moral Theology No. 5 (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 130.

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L.J. Lebret.[38] Paul VI argued that development cannot be confined simply to the economic realm; for him, "neither individuals nor nations should regard the possession of more and more goods as the ultimate objective … [for the] exclusive pursuit of material possessions prevents [one's] growth as a human being and stands in opposition to [one's] true grandeur."[39] The ultimate goal of development should be "full-bodied humanism"[40] and should lead to the process of becoming more human and more open to transcendent values: "True humanism points the way toward God and acknowledges the task to which we are called, the task which offers us the real meaning of human life."[41]

In the encyclical, Paul VI argued that various structural factors in the international economic system served to perpetuate the poverty of disadvantaged peoples in developing countries and widen the economic gap between rich and poor nations. In his analysis of these structural factors, he referred especially to colonialism's creation of a system in which the economies of many poor countries were made to depend on the export of one or two agricultural crops or other natural resources. Paul VI thus reiterated the Second Vatican Council's strong emphasis on the fact that the goods of the earth are intended for all.[42]

7. Octogesima Adveniens

Published in 1971, *Octogesima Adveniens* is the second social encyclical of Paul VI. In it, he asserted the need for local communities to engage in social analysis and apply the principles of Catholic social

[38]Lebret played an important role in the drafting of *Populorum Progressio*. He is described as an "eminent specialist" on development issues. For a discussion of Lebret's work, see the chapter titled "L. J. Lebret: Pioneer of Development Ethics" in D. Goulet, *A New Moral Order: Studies in Development Ethics and Liberation Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 1974), 84–96.

[39]Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, no. 19.

[40]Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, no. 42.

[41]Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, no. 42.

[42]Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, no. 22.

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teaching to their own varying social conditions.[43] Paul VI was especially critical of the impact of transnational corporations on global economic, political, and social life:

> We can see new economic powers emerging, the multinational enterprise, which by the concentration and flexibility of their means can conduct autonomous strategies which are largely independent of the national political powers and therefore not subject to control from the point of view of the common good. By extending their activities, these private organizations can lead to a new and abusive form of economic domination on the social, cultural and even political level. The excessive concentration of means and powers that Pope Pius XI already condemned on the fortieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum* is taking on a new and very real image.[44]

It is important to note as well that the mention of ecological issues as an important concern in Catholic social teaching appears for the first time in this encyclical: "[Human persons are] suddenly becoming aware," Paul VI states, "that by an ill-considered exploitation of nature [they risk] destroying it and becoming in [their] turn the victim of this degradation.… This is a wide-ranging social problem which concerns the entire human family."[45]

8. Justice in the World

The 1971 Synod of Bishops in Rome produced the document *Justice in the World* which reaffirmed and deepened the critical and structural analysis that previous encyclicals brought into the discussion of development. In it, the bishops stressed the inadequacy of models of development centered upon the maximization of economic growth and criticized the detrimental impacts of these approaches on many important dimensions of human life, including spirituality and

[43]Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens* [On the Occasion of the Eightieth Anniversary of the Encyclical "Rerum Novarum"] (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1971), no. 33.

[44]Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens*, no. 44.

[45]Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens*, no. 21.

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communal cohesion. The Synod also reiterated concerns about the negative ecological impacts of these growth-focused models:

> Furthermore, such is the demand for resources and energy by the richer nations, whether capitalist or socialist, and such are the effects of dumping by them in the atmosphere and the sea that irreparable damage would be done to the essential elements of life on earth, such as air and water, if their high rates of consumption and pollution, which are constantly on the increase, were extended to the whole of humanity.[46]

The document rejected trickle-down theories of development, and the bishops argued that much greater stress needed to be placed on the just distribution of wealth. They asserted that moral appeals without concrete efforts to modify social structures are inadequate, emphasizing the objective obstacles that social structures place in the way of the conversion of hearts.[47] The document thus heightened the need for a critical and structural analysis of injustice. It emphasized the component of justice in Christian faith and in the institutional life of the Church, and placed greater stress on ecological issues.

9. Evangelii Nuntiandi

Issued by Paul VI in 1975, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* emphasized working for social justice as one of the essential components of development and of the Church's evangelizing task. Evangelization, Paul VI declared, "involves an explicit message, adapted to the different situations constantly being realized, about the rights and duties of every human being … about international life, peace, justice and development—a message especially energetic today about liberation."[48]

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[46]World Synod of Catholic Bishops, *Justice in the World* (1971), no. 11. Available at https://www.cctwincities.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Justicia-in-Mundo.pdf.

[47]*Justice in the World*, no. 16.

[48]Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1975), no. 29.

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What is important to note in this encyclical is its mention of "small communities" (*communautés de base*). Commenting for the first time in papal teaching about such communities, Paul VI affirmed their value and importance as "[places] of evangelization, for the benefit of the bigger communities, especially the individual Churches."[49] It is hoped that these basic ecclesial communities "will correspond to their most fundamental vocation: as hearers of the Gospel which is proclaimed to them[,] and [that as] privileged beneficiaries of evangelization, they will soon become proclaimers of the Gospel themselves."[50] At the same time, however, Paul VI strongly cautioned that such communities must always have a firm spiritual basis, remain in communion with the Church's Magisterium, and not become sectarian.[51]

10. Laborem Exercens

In his first social encyclical which was issued in 1981, Pope John Paul II proclaimed the necessity of respecting the subjective dimension of work and the priority of labor over capital, arguing that human dignity must not be degraded for the sake of power or profit.[52] Grounded in an assertion that work is an essential feature of human dignity as well as a sharing with God in the task of creation, he takes a very positive view of the issue of work, seeing it, along with respect for human dignity and the rights of workers, as being "a key, probably the essential key, to the whole social question, if we try to see that question really from the point of view of [humanity's] good."[53]

In light of his concern for the dignity and rights of workers, John Paul II strongly criticized both the liberal capitalism of the West

[49]Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 58.

[50]Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 58.

[51]Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 58.

[52]John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens* [On Human Work] (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1981), no. 12.

[53]John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, no. 3.

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and the so-called socialist systems of the East. Indeed, he would refer to these socialist systems in a later encyclical as being, in reality, forms of state capitalism given their unacceptable treatment of workers.[54] According to him, any system in which the worker is treated as an instrument of production, "whatever the programme or name under which it occurs, should rightly be called 'capitalism'."[55]

11. Sollicitudo Rei Socialis

The critique of the pervading dominance of erroneous and morally dubious theories of development was one of the strongest points in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, the second social encyclical of John Paul II, issued in 1987 to commemorate the 20th anniversary of *Populorum Progressio*. In it, he reflected on what had taken place in the world over the previous twenty years with regard to the quest for development, and presented a rather negative portrait overall of the prevailing situation, asserting that the plight of the world's poor had become notably worse during the preceding two decades. He devoted much attention to exploring what had gone wrong, noting that the hope for development, which was nurtured by so many, had not been fulfilled and had remained an illusion.[56] Indeed, it is important to point out that flawed models of development have to be corrected as these consistently place central emphasis on economic growth to the neglect of many other crucial factors, such as concerns for social, spiritual, and ecological well-being.[57] The policies of both East and West, as John Paul II argued, have been characterized by the quest for power and profit.

[54]This criticism was cited in John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* [On the Hundreth Anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*] (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1991), no. 35.

[55]John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, no. 7.

[56]John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* [For the Twentieth Anniversary of *Populorum Progressio*] (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1987), no. 16.

[57]John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, no. 15.

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12. Centesimus Annus

Development has become more problematic where indifference has become its feature. This was the stinging critique brought forward by John Paul II's 1991 encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, where he asserted that the human inadequacies of capitalism and the resulting domination of things over people were far from disappearing.[58] He highlighted in particular the reality that many people, perhaps the majority, live in conditions characterized by marginalization and exploitation while a wealthy minority lives in a state of equally unacceptable convenience characterized by crass materialism, wastefulness, apathy, alienation, and a lack of spiritual values.[59] A lot of individuals, according to him, "are still living in conditions of great material and moral poverty."[60]

John Paul II stressed that genuine development will require "sacrificing the positions of income and of power enjoyed by the more developed economies."[61] He strongly emphasized the necessity of changes in lifestyles, models of production and consumption, and established structures of power that govern societies today.[62] The encyclical also highlighted the need for adequate interventions and guidance on the part of the global community, along with a greater sharing of wealth through unconditioned development aid, debt relief, and other redistributive measures.[63] Equally worrying, moreover, and as John Paul II explains, is the "anthropological error"[64] that leads to the destruction of the environment.

[58]John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, no. 35.

[59]John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, no. 19.

[60]John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, no. 42.

[61]John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, no. 52.

[62]John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, no. 58.

[63]John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, no. 52.

[64]This idea was later developed by Francis. See Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 116.

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> 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 it did not have its own requisites and a prior God-given purpose.… Instead of carrying out his role as a co-operator with God in the work of creation, man sets himself up in place of God and thus ends up provoking a rebellion on the part of nature, which is more tyrannized than governed by him.[65]

13. Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church

This rather expansive document, published in 2004 by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (PCJP), encompasses principles and themes brought out by the preceding social encyclicals. To understand its unprecedented nature, one must recall that the contents of the previous social encyclicals were articulated over the past century with respect to particular occasions or social circumstances. The *Compendium* is an attempt to integrate these principles and themes in a systematic and definitive way into the structure and scope of the entire body of social teaching.

The document is organized into three parts. Part One reviews the background of the theological doctrines pertinent to Catholic social teaching, focusing on God's activity in the created order and mission of the Church, before setting forth four foundational principles for reflection: the dignity of the human person, the common good, subsidiarity, and solidarity. An elaborate discourse is devoted to human dignity, clearly the most important of these, while the remaining sections discuss the other three principles. Part Two applies the criteria for judgment, with chapter-length treatments of seven key aspects or institutions of human society: the family, human work, the economy, civil society, the international community, the environment, and military conflict. Part Three provides church leaders and the lay faithful with guidance for social action. A short concluding chapter

[65]John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, no. 37.

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then ends with a restatement of the ideal of Catholic social teaching, which is to build a "civilization of love."[66]

What is most significant in the PCJP document is its dedication of an entire chapter to environmental issues.[67] It encourages Christians to view the environment with an affirmative attitude, avoid a gloom-and-doom mentality, and recognize God's presence in nature. It calls to mind the opening of the book of Genesis, in which the human person is placed as the summit of creation and is entrusted by God with its care. It stipulates that "the relationship of [the human person] with the world is a constitutive part of his [or her] human identity. This relationship is in turn the result of another still deeper relationship between [the human person] and God."[68]

The *Compendium* stresses further that we should "look to the future with hope, sustained by the promise and the covenant that God continually renews,"[69] noting that in the Old Testament we see how Israel lived its faith in an environment that was seen as a gift from God, and that in the New Testament we realize how Jesus makes use of the natural elements in some of his miracles to remind the disciples of his Father's providence. In his death and resurrection, "Jesus inaugurates a new world in which everything is subjected to him (cf. 1 Cor. 15:20–28) and he creates anew those relationships of order and harmony that sin had destroyed."[70]

The PCJP document also affirms that progress made by science and technology that serves the purpose of uplifting human lives is in accord with God's will. It is not saying that the Church is opposed to

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[66]Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004), no. 580.

[67]See Chapter Ten, titled "Safeguarding the Environment," in *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, nos. 451–487.

[68]*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 452.

[69]*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 451.

[70]*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 454.

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scientific progress, which is a part of God-given human creativity; what it is stressing is the truth that "a central point of reference for every scientific and technological application is respect for men and women, which must also be accompanied by a necessary attitude of respect for other living creatures."[71] The use of the earth, therefore, should not be arbitrary and needs to be inspired by a spirit of cooperation with God. To forget this is to reduce the environment to "mechanistic terms," accompanied oftentimes by the false idea that its resources are unlimited, and see development in a purely materialistic dimension, in which first place is "given to doing and having rather than to being, [which] causes serious forms of human alienation."[72]

The document, nevertheless, also warns about going to the other extreme of attributing absolute value to the environment. It points out that an eco-centric or bio-centric vision of the environment falls into the error of putting all living beings on the same level, thereby ignoring the qualitative difference between human persons and other creatures. The document insists that the key to avoiding such a mistake is to maintain a transcendent vision,[73] as we are more likely to act responsibly toward the environment when we remember God's role in creation. Christian culture, the document explains, considers creatures as gifts from God to be nurtured and safeguarded. Caring for the environment thus falls within the responsibility of ensuring the common good, in which creation is destined for all: "Responsibility for the environment, the common heritage of [humankind], extends not only to present needs but also to those of the future.… This is a responsibility that present generations have towards those of the future.…"[74]

Concerning biotechnology, the *Compendium* acknowledges the possibilities it offers as a source of hope but also that these raise alarms as well. While the Christian view of creation in principle allows for

[71]*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 459.

[72]*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 462.

[73]*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, nos. 463–464.

[74]*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 467.

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human intervention in nature as the latter is not some sort of sacred object that must be left alone, the ability to do so is nevertheless a gift that needs to be used responsibly. The modification of the properties of living beings must be accompanied by a careful evaluation of the benefits and risks of such actions. Biotechnology needs to be guided by the same ethical criteria that should orient our actions in the social and political spheres while also taking into account duties of justice and solidarity.[75]

In the application of the principles of justice and solidarity to biotechnology, the PCJP document asks that "equitable commercial exchange, without the burden of unjust stipulations … be facilitated." It is indispensable to promote the development of the most disadvantaged nations, in particular through "the exchange of scientific and technological knowledge and the transfer of technologies to developing countries."[76]

In pursuing the principle of the common good and the sharing of the earth's resources, the *Compendium* reminds us that God created the goods of the earth for the use of all, that these "must be shared equitably, in accordance with justice and charity."[77] Emphasizing that environmental concerns are often connected to poverty, the document explains that the poor are unable to cope with problems such as the erosion of farm land due to economic and technological limitations. Many of them also live in urban slums affected by pollution. The *Compendium* thus stresses that "in such cases hunger and poverty make it virtually impossible to avoid an intense and excessive exploitation of the environment."[78] Yet the answer to the problem, it insists, is not in policies of population control that do not respect the dignity of the human person; rather, it argues that population growth is "fully

[75]*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, nos. 472–473.

[76]*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 475.

[77]*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 481.

[78]*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 482.

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compatible with an integral and shared development."[79] Development must be integral so that it can ensure the authentic good of all.

The PCJP document also appeals for the adoption of appropriate lifestyles to save the environment, stressing that the virtues of sobriety, temperance, and self-discipline must be practiced at the individual and community level.[80] This means we need to break the mentality that is based on mere consumption and develop an awareness of the ecological consequences of our choices.

Ultimately, the *Compendium* urges that one's actions toward the environment—as a Christian endowed with moral responsibility—must be characterized by gratitude and appreciation.[81] It contends that one should always remember that the world reveals the mystery of God who created and sustains it. Rediscovering this profound meaning of nature not only helps one to discover God but also motivates one to act responsibly toward the environment.

14. Caritas in Veritate

Pope Benedict XVI presented his view on integral human development and its significance for the realization of love in truth in his 2009 encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*. As a critique of the materialistic view of development, he argued that "development requires a transcendent vision of the person."[82] The theological stress in this encyclical is therefore very manifest; indeed, Benedict XVI argued that the idea of development "needs God: without [God], development is either denied, or entrusted exclusively to [humanity], who falls into the trap of thinking [they] can bring about [their] own salvation, and

[79]*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 483.

[80]*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 486.

[81]*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 487.

[82]Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* [On Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth] (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2009), no. 11.

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ends up promoting a dehumanized form of development."[83] The tone of the arguments is clearly in line with Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio*, particularly as Benedict XVI referred to the "development of the whole person and of all the person," just as Paul VI formulated it.

Caritas in Veritate also reiterated the need for a holistic approach to the complex ecological problems that the present generation is facing today. It states that

> our duties towards the environment are linked to our duties towards the human person, considered in himself [or herself] and in relation to others. It would be wrong to uphold one set of duties while trampling on the other. Herein lies a grave contradiction in our mentality and practice today: one which demeans the person, disrupts the environment[,] and damages society.[84]

What is underlined thus in these arguments is a strong critique of the dominant paradigm of development which compartmentalizes everything and treats the human person, society, and the environment as entities that are subservient to economic growth and development.

15. Laudato Si'

While previous magisterial documents[85] had already taken the importance of environmental discourse into consideration, none have done so as comprehensively and as exhaustively as has *Laudato Si'*. Issued by Pope Francis in 2015, this social encyclical is the first Church document by far that treats the issue of the environment systematically. Through it, Francis has expanded the conversation by

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[83]Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 11.

[84]Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 51. The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* sharply points this out as well: "Care for the environment represents a challenge for all of humanity. It is a matter of a common and universal duty, that of respecting a common good" (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 466).

[85]Francis continues the environmental teachings of his predecessors in *Laudato Si'*, especially nos. 3–6.

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inviting everyone, regardless of creed, race, language, etc., into an open and honest dialogue in light of humanity's shared responsibility to care for the earth as our common home.[86]

While the encyclical does not take a critical evaluation of the sustainable development model, it asserts that "authentic human development has a moral character … [that it] presumes full respect for the human person, [and that] it must also be concerned for the world around us.…"[87] The encyclical notes that humanity's fascination with the technocratic paradigm, which promises unlimited growth, is worrisome, with the paradigm's fundamental problem being that it "is based on the lie that there is an infinite supply of the earth's goods, [which] leads to the planet being squeezed dry beyond every limit."[88] Francis therefore suggests that

> since everything is closely interrelated, and today's problems call for a vision capable of taking into account every aspect of the global crisis … we now consider some elements of an *integral ecology*, one which clearly respects its human and social dimensions.[89]

The environmental, economic, social, and cultural ecologies must be taken together as interconnected parts of the whole.[90] It means that "strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature."[91]

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[86]Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 13.

[87]Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 5.

[88]Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 106.

[89]Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 137.

[90]Francis, *Laudato Si'*, nos. 138–146.

[91]Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 139.

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Key Themes of Catholic Social Teaching as Points of Critique for the Concept of Sustainable Development

Catholic social teaching has raised important points in particular that are relevant to the critique of the sustainable development model. The following key themes establish, in summary, how the model is inadequate as a paradigm for environmental sustainability.

1. The only true development is integral human development, which for Catholic social teaching is holistic, i.e., having moral, economic, social, cultural, spiritual, and environmental components, and consists of all things that enable persons to become more fully human. Sustainable development has at best only three-fold foci: economic growth, social equality, and environmental protection.

2. Simply equating development with economic growth is morally unacceptable. The commercialization of almost every aspect of life, of the human person, of the environment, and of social structures is not in line with the principles of Christian morality. It is morally flawed since human persons, the environment, and society are to be treated as subjects of development, not its objects. The propensity for economic growth undermines the essential moral, social, and religious values of life; indeed, while it is crucial that the basic material needs of all are met, great emphasis must be placed on "being more" and not on simply "having more."

3. All nations, whether rich or poor, need integral human development, for one of its central principles is that the goods of the earth are intended for all. The universal destination of goods implies, in a world in which many people lack the basic necessities of life, that

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there is a need for simpler and more austere lifestyles on the part of those who possess more than what is truly necessary. Individual and collective consciences should be formed to nurture the value of fostering the common good, particularly so that all communities can achieve the conditions necessary for people to reach their full potential and become the kinds of persons God intends them to be (1 Cor. 12:7).

4. Working for integral human development is a moral and religious responsibility given that God is concerned with the integral well-being of each human person.

5. Human persons need to be the subjects of development, not its objects. Sustainable development that focuses only on economic growth tends to reduce human persons, especially powerless workers and the poor, to instruments for making profit.

6. Without authentic integral human development, genuine peace in global and local communities cannot be achieved. The focus of sustainable development on material well-being, social equity, and environmental protection is not enough, for peace can be achieved only if there is also social justice.

The key insight of Catholic social teaching that constitutes the central tenet of the Christian view of integral human development is synthesized in John 10:10: "I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly." Life in abundance with Jesus means that there is no deprivation in its moral, economic, social, cultural, spiritual, and environmental aspects. Jesus warned about the dangers of attachment to wealth and the heedless acquisition of material possessions (Lk. 12:15), preached the blessings that come to the poor (Lk. 6:20), and said that we will have to render an account for all that has been entrusted to us (Mt. 25:14ff). He urges us in this manner to have a different way of living based not on a lifestyle of consumption, which sustainable development espouses, but on the prudent use of the goods of this planet which God has entrusted to us.

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Conclusion

While the notion of sustainable development seems to be an appealing paradigm for addressing the environmental crisis, it is problematic, inadequate, and falls short of its intended goal. Its provenance in the economic model of development makes its framework of sustaining the environment ultimately hollow, a bucket half-empty. It is clear indeed, from a moral point of view, that sustainable development has a conceptual problem, for at the core of its concept is profit, which would rule supreme at the expense of the environment.

The environmental crisis is also a moral crisis,[92] not just a socio-economic and environmental one. What makes the concept of sustainable development tricky, therefore, is the fact that it was conceived with the economic agenda as its framework. It still sees the "possibility for a new era of economic growth," along with an emphasis on "policies that sustain and expand the environmental resource base."[93] It is this aspect—the obsession with economic growth—that makes the concept of sustainable development ultimately unable to address the issue of environmental sustainability.

With its idea of "integral human development" providing a stinging critique against the reduction of development to mere maximization of economic profit, Catholic social teaching provides much insight into the harmful aspects of economic growth as has been conventionally pursued. It argues that development should seek instead to foster the total well-being of the human person. This means that greater attention must be given to the moral and spiritual aspects of human life.

At the core of Christian life lies the two-fold commandment of love of God and of neighbor (Lk. 10:27). The environmental crisis challenges us to love God by loving God's creation, not by abusing it,

[92]John Paul II, *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation* (Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace) (January 1, 1990).

[93]WCED, *Our Common Future*, 1.

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and to love our neighbor, particularly those future generations who will bear the brunt of this ecological disaster.[94] Indeed, environmentalists have long linked the modern environmental crisis to a crisis of the human spirit, to that of the heart and soul. We no longer experience our belongingness to nature in a way that would make us willing to change our lifestyles in order to sustain the future of our world. St. John Paul II calls it a moral crisis,[95] and rightly so. What we need to do is address the roots of the problem. We have to find ways to shift our core values and paradigm of development so that we can have a meaningful and fulfilling relationship with the environment.

[94]Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 160.

[95]John Paul II, *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation*, nos. 5 and 13.

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