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JESUS, EVOLUTION AND THE ENVIRONMENT

A Critique of the CBCP's Statement on the Environment

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In recent years, there has been a growing global consciousness of the environmental issue. There has been a steadily rising awareness throughout the world of how our lifestyle as a species has adversely affected the natural world. Numerous scientists, theologians, and other concerned citizens of the world have tried to call attention to how humankind—either consciously or unconsciously—has damaged the natural environment to an unprecedented extent. This phenomenon is also present in our own country, the Philippines. The rather widespread use by fellow Filipinos of cyanide and dynamite fishing, indiscriminate slash-and-burn farming, unrelenting and indiscriminate logging, etc., have eradicated natural habitats, upset the ecological balance and nearly driven a number of plant and animal species into extinction.

In our own country, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) has responded to this situation by issuing "What is Happening to Our Beautiful Land?"[1] a pastoral letter on ecology.

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[1]Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, "What is Happening to Our Beautiful Land?" (http://www.cbcponline.org/documents/1980s/1988-ecology.html).

Its purpose was to educate and to bring to consciousness the environment issue, which has an uncanny way of staying unnoticed if one does not have a realistic view of the whole global environmental situation. This paper will begin by discussing the CBCP document, first its strengths and then its weaknesses, and will present some ideas that may be helpful for possible future reformulations of the statement.

In the end, it is the hope of the author that this paper may be a small step in the direction in which the entire Church will eventually lead all of us, the entire cosmos, into a more responsible and meaningful relationship with creation and with the Creator.

Outline of the CBCP Statement

What follows is an outline of the statement, through which a comprehensive understanding of what the CBCP said can be attained.

"What is Happening to Our Beautiful Land?"

I. Introduction
   A. The present situation of the environment in the Philippines
      1. The Philippines has many issues (e.g., political instability, economic decline, growth in armed conflict) but there is a more deep-seated crisis that lies at the root of many problems.
      2. All the living systems on land and in the seas around us are being ruthlessly exploited. Within a short period of a few years:
         a. Luxuriant forests have turned to brown eroded hills.
         b. Flowing streams are now dried riverbeds.
         c. Productivity of croplands has fallen.
         d. Fish catch is now shrinking.
         e. Coral reefs and mangrove forests have been extensively destroyed.
      3. The attack on the natural world only benefits very few Filipinos.
   B. What does our faith say about this situation?
      1. In the light of the Gospel, this assault on creation is sinful and contrary to the teachings of our faith.

2. How is creation related to God?
   a. God created this world.
   b. God loves the world and is pleased with it.
   c. God created man and woman in his image and charged them to be stewards of creation.
   d. God wishes to share God's divine life with every creature.

C. Many have already called attention to this situation.
   1. Tribal people all over the Philippines have seen the destruction and have cried out in anguish.
   2. Those who value and who credibly study ecology have tried to alert people about the devastation taking place.

D. There is now a call to appreciate, respect, and defend life.
   1. People motivated by religious faith should develop a deep appreciation for the fragility of our islands' life-systems, reflect on the beauty of the Philippines, and give thanks to God for the many ways he has gifted our land.
   2. Christian men and women are called to take action and to stand on the side of life, and to cherish and protect what remains of the bounty of the Earth. Otherwise, there will continue to be less nutritious food, poorer health, an uncertain future, which could lead to an increase in political and social unrest.

II. The Beauty and the Pain of the Earth

A. The Beauty of the Earth
   1. The typical scenery of a barrio has wide plains of rice paddies flanked by coconut trees with *cogon* grass on the hills behind. Although landscapes like this mean so much to us and are beautiful, they do not represent the original vegetation that God created. In fact, they show the heavy hand of human labor, planning and shortsightedness.
   2. Our meditation must begin on the original beauty of our land, rivers and seas, on the wonderful community of the living before human beings came. It was our tribal forefathers who showed sensitivity and respect for nature through their hunting and food gathering techniques.
      a. Forests. The Philippines used to be a country covered with a blanket of trees, with over 7,500 species of flowering plants, not to mention numerous animals, birds and insects. Through the forest, clear rivers flowed into sparkling lakes, which

abounded in fish and aquatic life. Birds with bright plumes and varying calls added color and song to the forests. Small and large animals roamed the forest and feasted on its bounty. God is the creator who fashioned this world of life, color, mutual support and fruitfulness.

b. Seas. The Philippine islands were surrounded with blue seas, fertile mangroves and enchanting coral reefs.

3. Creation is a long process. It took millions of years to mold and reshape this land with all its beauty, richness and splendor. This original state is a fruit of God's wisdom and goodness.
4. God intended this land for men and women to be the stewards of his creation, to care for it, to protect its fruitfulness and not to allow it to be devastated. And by protecting it, we ensure that farmers produce food that will sustain us.

B. The Pain of the Earth

1. Our Forests Laid Waste. A few thousand years after human beings arrived in the Philippines, much of the richness and beauty are already gone. Humans have forgotten to live peacefully with other creatures, hunting them relentlessly and destroying their habitats. Out of the original 30 million hectares, there are now only 1 million hectares of primary forest left. Loggers and *kaingineros* are wiping out even the few remaining strands of forest. Now only cocks are heard crowing, with no sign of the soaring eagle or the colorful hornbill.
2. The Hemorrhage of Our Lifeblood. The erosion of fertile soil is equivalent to losing 100,000 hectares of soil one meter thick each year. Aside from retarding and killing coral polyps, continued erosion threatens the food supply for a growing population.
3. Deserts in the Sea. Due to the dumping of mine tailings and other chemicals into the sea, together with the use of destructive fishing methods such as *muro ami* and dynamite, fish habitats are being destroyed. In fact, only 5 percent of corals in the Philippines are pristine. Chemicals poison land, rivers, and the sea—and these, in time, will poison us as well.
4. Recent Destruction Carried Out in the Name of Progress. The building of roads and the availability of electricity are usually called progress. However, the poor are as disadvantaged as ever and the natural world has been grievously wounded.

a. Lands produce less food.
b. Air in the cities is heavy with noxious fumes.
c. Forests are almost gone.
d. Rivers are almost empty.
e. Springs and wells no longer sparkle with living water.
f. Flash floods sweep through towns and cities.
g. Lakes and estuaries are full of silt.
h. Toxic waste and mine tailings are dumped into rivers and seas.
i. Poison is taken in by organisms; in turn, we feed on these.

5. Through our thoughtlessness and greed, we have sinned against God and creation.

III. We Can and Must Do Something About it

A. The bishops call on all Filipinos to recognize the urgency of this task and to respond to it now. Filipinos must be particularly careful to protect what remains of the forests, rivers, and corals, and to heal, wherever possible, the damage that has already been done.

B. Signs of Hope

1. Tribal People. Tribal Filipinos today still attempt to live in harmony with nature. They are living examples of how the exploitative approach to the natural world is foreign to Filipino culture.
2. Filipino Family Values. Parents, particularly mothers, care for and protect their children especially when they are sick. No sacrifice is too demanding when it comes to caring for a sick member of the family. These values of love, concern, and sacrifice for the sick and the weak must now include the wider sphere of our land, which is in need of healing.
3. Sensitivity to Beauty. Even in the poorest homes, parents and children care for plants and flowers.
4. Initiatives Already Taken. These concrete initiatives can effect real change if they can join together as one movement.
   a. Massive local resistance succeeded in suspending the Chico dam project and the Bataan nuclear power plant.
   b. The residents of San Fernando, Bukidnon and Madsalip, Zamboanga del Sur, defended with their own bodies what remained of their forest from loggers.

c. In the Santa Cruz Mission in South Cotabato, serious efforts are underway to reforest bald hills and to develop ecologically sound ways of farming.

d. The diocese of Pagadian has chosen the Eucharist and ecology as its pastoral focus for the year.

IV. Theological References

A. Our Vision

1. The new vision must come from an understanding of the world as God intended it to be. The shape of this world can be known by looking at how God originally fashioned it.
2. This vision is also grounded in faith. God created this beautiful and fruitful world for all his creatures and that he has made us stewards of his creation.
3. The relationship that links God, human beings and the rest of creation is emphasized in the covenant that God made with Noah. As people of the covenant, we are called to protect the land and to establish just human communities in our land.

B. Christ Our Life

1. Jesus lived lightly on the earth and displayed an attitude of respect toward the natural world. He was very much aware that all creatures in God's creation were related.
2. Christ is the centerpoint of human history and creation. The rich unfolding of the universe and the flowering of life are centered on him. Therefore, the destruction of creation defaces the image of Christ etched in creation.

C. Mary, Mother of Life

1. Mary is on the side of the poor and those who are rejected (cf. Luke 1:52).
2. As a mother, she is pained and saddened when she sees people destroy the integrity of creation.
3. Therefore, as the Mother of Life, Mary challenges us to abandon the pathway of death and return to the way of life.

V. What We Suggest

A. Individuals. Be aware of environmental problems around you and engage them from within your own circle of influence, your family and community.

B. Church

1. The Church as a community is called to conversion regarding the environment, the ultimate pro-life issue.

2. There is great need for a Filipino theology of creation, sensitive to our own unique culture and religious heritage.
3. Liturgies must deliberate on the beauty and pain of our world, our connection to the natural world and the on-going struggle for social justice.
4. Catholic schools should give special importance to the theme of peace, justice, and the integrity of creation.

C. Government
1. We ask the government not to pursue short-term economic gains at the expense of long-term ecological damage.
2. We suggest that the government group together all the agencies that deal with ecological issues into an independent department that will work with other departments for the welfare of the environment.
   a. This department should regularly publish a report on the state of the environment of each region and of the country as a whole.
   b. This department needs legislative teeth to ensure that its policies and programs are implemented.
   c. Research on the ecosystems of our land and the problems they face are also important.

D. Non-government. NGOs are important in developing a widespread ecological awareness among the people, and in monitoring and ensuring that the government does not renege on their commitment to work for the environment.

VI. Conclusion. This brief statement about our living world and its deterioration attempts to reflect the cry of our people and the cry of our land. As bishops, we have tried to listen and to respond to their cry. At the root of the problem is an exploitative mentality that is at variance with the Gospel of Jesus. We call for widespread education and immediate action.

Evaluation of the CBCP Statement

Strengths of the Statement

Explicitly on the Environment

The CBCP's "What is Happening to Our Beautiful Land?" is the first document of its kind in the Philippines and is, so far, the only

one explicitly focused on the environment as a whole, aside from the one-page CBCP statement of concern in 1998 that focused on the Mining Act of 1995. "What is Happening to Our Beautiful Land?" calls attention to the environmental issue by juxtaposing the natural beauty of our land and the devastation we Filipinos have caused. It is a call for help, hoping to bring this issue to the level of consciousness by also making it an integral aspect of one's faith life.

From a somewhat theological perspective, the document acknowledges that the Philippines used to be very rich in terms of its natural resources—with all of us, in one way or another, contributing to its ruin. But it also provides hope by affirming the cultural traits that can help Filipinos recover what was lost, and by citing many concrete instances when Filipino communities, on their own initiatives, have defended their land against abuse. The sad state of our environment and the need for our immediate action are unmistakably the focal point of the document.

Filipino Symbols and Values

The document cites three symbols or values that provide signs of hope that the Filipino people have inherent cultural resources from which they may draw strength and guidance in the endeavor of environmental care and repair. These are: a) the indigenous peoples' regard for nature; b) strong family ties; and c) native appreciation for beauty in nature.

By citing the experience of Filipino indigenous communities, the document asserts that the Filipino people have, deep in their culture, an appreciation and regard for nature that is neither exploitative nor destructive. "Our forefathers and tribal brothers and sisters today still attempt to life in harmony with nature. They see the Divine Spirit in the living world and show their respect through prayers and offerings." This is made to show that it is possible for whole groups of people to benefit from but, at that same time, harmoniously co-exist with the environment.

The document also praised the Filipino family, underlining the love and care parents have for their children and the extent to which

they will go in order to keep them well and healthy. This attitude of concern for the weak and the sick may be extended outside the family to include the ailing environment. "The values we see in our families of patient toil, concern for all and a willingness to sacrifice for the good of others are the very values which we must now transfer to the wider sphere in our efforts to conserve, heal and love our land." Native to the Filipino family is a compassionate heart for the afflicted, which may be encouraged to include suffering non-human beings.

Finally, poverty has never hindered the Filipinos' appreciation for beauty. Even the poorest of homes will have flowers, pictures of beautiful houses on their walls, or at least some form of décor. By and large, Filipinos have an appreciation for beauty in nature, which eventually manifests itself in community-based efforts to resist the building of dams, the clearing of forests, etc., in order to preserve the beauty of the land.

Theological Basis

The document points to some theological basis to support its call for environmental action. For one, it consistently refers to God the Creator, as depicted in the two creation narratives of Genesis, and to our role as stewards of God's creation. Also, human beings and creation are bound by a covenant, initially made between God and Noah after the flood (Gen 9:19), which continues to bind us in preserving and protecting the integrity and beauty of God's creation.

The document also looks to Jesus Christ and finds theological relevance in two ways. First, it sees Jesus of Nazareth, through how He lived lightly on the land, as having the proper regard for creation. "We have much to learn from the attitude of respect which Jesus displayed toward the natural world. He was very much aware that all the creatures in God's creation are related." Second, taking off from Paul's theology of Christ and creation, it briefly says that "Christ is the centerpoint of human history and creation."

Finally, reference is also made to Mary as the Mother of Life, who listens to her children and turns to the side of the poor, the weak, and the rejected. "As a mother she is pained and saddened

when she sees people destroy the integrity of creation through soil erosion, blast-fishing or poisoning land." She, too, is troubled by the destruction of the environment and makes a call for us to "abandon the pathway of death and return to the way of life."

Weaknesses of the Statement

Unclear Motivations

Although the CBCP document makes a definite and unambiguous call to address environmental issues, it is not clear about the deeper motivations for doing so. It seems that the reasons for environmental action are varied and mixed together, with anthropocentric motivations as one of the strongest. In the section entitled "A Call to Respect and Defend Life," it says:

> We, the Catholic Bishops of the Philippines, ask Christians and all people of goodwill in the country to reflect with us on the beauty of the Philippine land and seas which nourish and sustain our lives. As we thank God for the many ways He has gifted our land we must also resolve to cherish and protect what remains of this bounty for this and future generations of Filipinos. We are well aware that, for the vast majority of Filipinos, the scars on nature, which increasingly we see all around us, mean less nutritious food, poorer health and an uncertain future. This will inevitably lead to an increase in political and social unrest.

The fact that creation nourishes and sustains our lives is not being denied. Our dependence on the natural world and our gratitude for what we receive are not being contested. However, if the adverse effects on ourselves of a polluted world is used as the main argument and motivator for action, then we have reduced the value of creation according to how humanity is affected by it. "Because the living world is interconnected, the poison is absorbed by marine organisms. We in turn are gradually being poisoned when we eat seafood." In several scattered places in the document, this type of reasoning is evident.

The role of God, as the document treats it—that of Christ's, for example—hardly seems adequate. Reference to Christ is only because of how he lived lightly on the land and because of the "attitude of

respect which Jesus displayed toward the natural world. He was very much aware that all the creatures in God's creation are related." The document goes further, however, speaking of Christ as the "centerpoint of human history and creation." Unfortunately, it does not go very far at all in explaining this theme and in using it as a basis for environmental action.

Nostalgia and Human Intervention

The first section of the document focuses on the beauty and desirability of the pristine, wild, and untouched form of our land. It describes dense forests, clear flowing rivers and sparkling lakes, rich vegetation, etc., before the coming to the scene of any man or woman. This "original" beauty is emphasized and praised so much, while apparently looking down on any or all kinds of human intervention.

> As you read this letter or listen to sections of it being read, scenes from your barrio may come to mind. In your mind's eye you may see well laid out rice paddies flanked by coconuts with their fronds swaying in the breeze. Or you may hear the rustle of the *cogon* grass on the hills behind your barrio. These scenes mean so much to us and are beautiful. Yet they do not represent the original vegetation with which God has blessed our land. They show the heavy hand of human labor, planning and sometimes short-sightedness.

A certain sense of nostalgia is communicated. An unbridled preference for untouched nature, for a state prior to human involvement, is put forward as the ideal paradise. At the same time, there seems to be a sweeping judgment of human participation as necessarily evil and destructive.

> We often use the word progress to describe what has taken place over the past few decades. There is no denying in some areas our roads have improved and that electricity is more readily available. But can we say that there is real progress? Who has benefited most and who has borne the real costs? The poor are as disadvantaged as ever and the natural world has been grievously wounded. We have stripped it bare, silenced its sounds and banished other creatures, from the community of the living. Through our thoughtlessness and greed we have sinned against God and His Creation.

It cannot be denied that the sad state of the environment today is due to human action, either intentional or unintentional. It is true that humankind's ignorance and greed have played major roles in forging the present environmental predicament. However, it would be a mistake to regard all kinds of human intervention as destructive. Moreover, it would be unrealistic, and perhaps even immoral, to leave nature absolutely untouched, allowing human beings to die from diseases or other living creatures from natural calamities.

One source of hope that the document provides is the example set by indigenous peoples who are able to live lightly on the land.

> Despite the pain and despoliation which we now have mentioned, there are signs of hope. Our forefathers and tribal brothers and sisters today still attempt to live in harmony with nature. They see the Divine Spirit in the living world and show their respect through prayers and offerings. Tribal Filipinos remind us that the exploitative approach to the natural world is foreign to our Filipino culture.

It seems that tribal peoples are being held up as the ideal example for living harmoniously with the environment. The document, however, does not elaborate further as to how and to what extent should the other Filipinos imitate their tribal brothers and sisters. Should Filipinos live like the tribal groups? How are we called to do so? If it is impractical to imitate their lifestyle literally, how should their harmony with nature be lived out in the modern and ambiguous world?

In addition, the statement seems to put the blame for environmental destruction solely on the deliberate and malicious actions by human beings who are motivated by greed coupled with a lack of respect for the common good. Although greed and conscious action are certainly part of the reason, the statement is practically silent on how our unconscious habits of consumption and the repercussions of human activity—of which we are mostly ignorant about—have contributed immensely to the sad state of the natural world today.

Static Worldview: Environment as Completely Other

The creation narratives figure in a number of places in the document, referring to God as creator of all, and humankind as the stewards to whom God entrusted creation. "The Bible tells us that God created this beautiful and fruitful world for all His creatures to live in (Gen 1:1 - 2:4) and that He has given us the task of being stewards of His Creation (Gen 2:19-20)." As stewards, we have been called by God to protect creation and to help it get "back on its feet," as it were.

> You might ask: Why is it important to remember the original state of our land? First of all, it reminds us of how God, in His wisdom and goodness, shaped this land in this part of the world... God intended this land for us, his special creatures, but not so that we might destroy it and turn it into a wasteland. Rather, He charged us to be stewards of his creation, to care for it, to protect its fruitfulness and not to allow it to be devastated (Gen 1:28).

Although there is evident scriptural basis for the call for environmental action, it seems that it does so within a static worldview. From this perspective, there is apparently no need for an evolutionary worldview; it is irrelevant. Action for the environment on the one hand, and evolution on the other, seem to be totally unrelated topics here.

The statement does, however, acknowledge that the process of creation took a very long time; in fact, it has a section devoted to this. But it is not referring to the dynamic phenomenon of evolution at all. The document simply means that it took a very long process for creation to reach its original pristine state of perfection, which no longer exists because of human action.

The working theological-anthropological framework in this document is this: God created everything, God entrusted creation to humankind and commissioned humankind to act as its steward, and it is now our responsibility, with God's help, to take proper care of God's creation, for our own benefit and for future generations. "The Bible tells us that God created the world, (Gen 1:1); that he loves His world and is pleased with it (Gen 1:4,10,12,18,21,25,31); and

that He created man and woman in His image and charged them to be stewards of His creation (Gen 1:27-28)."

The perspective of the document, which betrays a static worldview, is that God created everything perfectly from the very beginning. There was nothing wrong or lacking with God's creation. This original state of perfection is what is meant when the document refers to our beautiful land in its wild and untouched condition.

But now, we must work to repair the damage we have caused. Our role as stewards has now been highlighted. However, the direction of our task in caring for the earth is to help bring it back to its original condition, to the way God originally intended it to be. In fact, this is the emphasis of the document's vision. "This vision must blossom forth from our understanding of the world as God intends it to be. We can know the shape of this world by looking at how God originally fashioned our world and laid it out before us." We are asked to reflect on and refer back to the original state of creation's perfection, and to bring creation back to its original state since it represents the fullest reality of what can possibly be found in the present.

Thus, the document sees the world as having begun in perfection, slowly degenerated through time, and with no possibility of creative innovation and progress. The environment, therefore, is regarded as something completely other, as sharing no common history, and having no inherent relation with our very own identity.

Suggested Ideas

Intrinsic Value

There are a variety of reasons for doing environmental action—or any type of action, for that matter. Denis Edwards summarizes the general categories and argues for the intrinsic value of creatures based on their relationship with God, rather than on their usefulness to humans.

> It is not an ethical view in which everything is centered on human beings (anthropocentrism). Nor is it simply the alternative view,

> which would see everything centered on living creatures (biocentrism). It is not even simply a view which would see the whole Earth or the universe as the center of ethical discussion (geocentrism or cosmocentrism). Rather, the argument here is that all things have value in themselves because of their relationship with God.[2]

Any given action is done mainly because of its benefit to ourselves, or to the creatures themselves, to the system in general, or because of God. The intrinsic value of creatures is not based on its benefit to us or because of the creatures in themselves. Their intrinsic value is viewed from a theocentric orientation, deriving their value from their relationship with God.

To use destructive fishing methods, such as cyanide or dynamite, in order to increase catch and profit without care for its repercussions on the coral reef would be anthropocentric. However, to argue against these fishing methods, although legitimate—but in favor of the benefits the preserved coral reef would have for the human community—would also be anthropocentric.

What follows are five aspects of God's participation in or relationship with materiality, derived from Rahner's christology within an evolutionary worldview, which may be used to defend a theocentric view of the intrinsic value of all creatures. This also brings in an evolutionary view of the world, which is virtually absent from the perspective of the CBCP statement.

God is the Divine Press Within Creatures

Within and despite the universal influence of entropy, there are certain pockets within the universe and its processes that show a tendency toward complexity, organization and order, a concentration of energy that builds things up. Our presence here in this universe is made possible by a widespread tendency toward self-organization and also a capacity to cross critical thresholds into new stages of

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[2]Denis Edwards, *Jesus the Wisdom of God: An Ecological Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 154.

complexity. This march toward self-organization and transcendence, which is observed through evolutionary change, occurs because of a power that comes from within the creature. However, this power is not due to the intrinsic nature of the creature but must be understood as the press of the divine being acting from within. God is at the heart of the evolutionary process, empowering it from within, continually drawing creation to a surprising and radically new future.

Christ is Present Within All Creatures, Pressing Toward Self-Transcendence

God is the absolute and dynamic power of self-transcendence at the heart of the universe, the divine nature that empowers the evolutionary movement from within. Since the press of the divine from within creation is admittedly Trinitarian, then the risen Christ, the second Person of the Trinity, is also at the heart of the evolutionary movement of the unfolding cosmos, radically and permanently one with the absolute being that empowers the universe. The divine nature of Jesus Christ is precisely the same divine nature that is creatively at work in all cosmic history.

Jesus, a Product of the Evolutionary Process

In an evolutionary worldview, what does Jesus as fully human mean? The man Jesus is necessarily a part of the evolutionary process: a product of the Big Bang, the formation of the Milky Way, the unfolding of our Solar System, the molding of the crust of the Earth, the development of life on the planet, and the emergence of consciousness. He, like us, is the universe come to consciousness, a person truly of the Earth, truly a part of biological evolution. He, too, is made of stardust. Jesus, as the product of the evolutionary history of matter, is the self-transcendence of the cosmos reaching out to God. Through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, the cosmos reaches a climax and utters the "yes" to God's self-communication, a response that the whole cosmos has been moving toward throughout its history. In this one product of evolutionary history, the cosmos accepts God in a definitive and absolute way.

Enduring Role of Jesus' Humanity for the Salvation of the Entire Cosmos

What is the place or role of the humanity of Jesus after his death and resurrection? The human nature of the second person of the Trinity is not a quality that can be discarded after having served its salvific purpose two thousand years ago. The humanity of Jesus has an enduring role in our relationship with God—it is and will always be our way to God. The human reality of Jesus, continuing to exist forever as the reality of the Word of God, permanently mediates God's grace to us. As Rahner writes of Jesus, "This created human nature is the indispensable and permanent gateway through which everything created must pass if it is to find the perfection of its eternal validity before God." Our union with God occurs not through some purely mystical flights into the absolute, but through Jesus of Nazareth. Furthermore, not only is the humanity of Jesus eternally significant for the salvation of human beings, but this same humanity of Jesus is also eternally significant for the whole created universe.

Redemption of the Entire Cosmos

The universe has a life span. Just like any living organism, birth and death punctuate its life. Whether an open or a closed system, the entire universe as we know it will eventually come to an end. But just as we believe in the resurrection of the human body in a glorified form, we can believe in God's fulfillment for the material universe as well. God's power and intention to save embraces not just humanity, but all of creation. Therefore, God's redemptive action can be understood not only to mean the redemption of the human body, but the redemption of the entire cosmos as well. Our relationship with the cosmos is not terminated at death. Rather, the glorified body somehow becomes the perfect expression of this relationship. Matter itself will be taken up into the final consummation of all things in God.

It is evident that God did not simply create the universe and then hand it over to humankind for stewarding. There is a very intimate relationship, an intertwining bond, between God and creation, so much so that it is plausible to argue for the intrinsic value of all creatures due to God's relationship with materiality and our world.

God is the divine press within creatures, urging creation to cross critical thresholds toward active self-transcendence. Jesus, through the Incarnation, is forever deeply bound to some form of materiality, having emerged from the evolutionary process Himself and having allowed His humanity to be the gateway for the salvation of the whole created cosmos, which will somehow have a share in the beatific vision. In short, God did not create and use matter only to discard it after it has served its purpose. Creation has an abiding value for God. Creation is "indeed the voice of the divine, and to destroy one of them irresponsibly is to stop arbitrarily a mode of divine self-expression."[3] Therefore, intrinsic to creation is a value that we should recognize and respect as well, and not simply measure the worth of creatures based on the benefit we gain from them.

Creative Tension Between Human Dignity and Creatures' Intrinsic Value

The document seems to be both non-interventionist and also anthropocentric at the same time. This is not a contradiction. On the one hand, the document seems to unwittingly espouse a non-interventionist stance because it gives too much preference for the wild and untouched form of nature while characterizing human involvement as necessarily evil. This position also downgrades the dignity and disregards the unique giftedness of the human person. Here, the interpretation of "equality" is that human beings are simply one species among many others, having no more dignity and rights than any other creature. The insect has as much value as the human person. On the other hand, as has already been pointed out, the document can be viewed as being anthropocentric (i.e., creation derives its value from its benefit to human beings).

An alternative, which avoids these two positions, understands the human person as the cosmos come to self-awareness. Human beings, self-conscious descendants of the material world, bear and

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[3]Ibid., 155.

represent all of creation. The material universe finds itself in them. Through each member of the human community, the cosmos presses forward toward self-consciousness. God has made matter in such a way that it becomes self-aware and capable of entering into a free and personal relationship with God. This view gives humankind and every human being enormous dignity. It highlights the unique giftedness of each human person, who is the most sophisticated concentration of consciousness and complexity in the entire known universe. At the same time, their inherent connection with and responsibility for the rest of creation are still affirmed. The recognition of human dignity remains balanced with creatures' intrinsic value.

> A Christian discipleship will need to recognize both the intrinsic value of all creatures and the unique dignity of human creatures. It will need to be committed to both ecology and justice. It will need to respect both the integrity of creation and the dignity of the human person... Social justice and care for the planet are not understood as competing options, but as part of one ethical stance. Action aimed at just economic and social conditions and action aimed at ecological sustainability are interrelated dimensions of the one praxis of discipleship.[4]

It is not right to hold up creation over humanity, in a non-interventionist orientation, and assume that humanity's actions are always and necessarily destructive. It is equally wrong, for human beings to lord it over creation and to determine its value in relation to them. Neither is creation equal in dignity with the human person; a human being and a dog do not have identical value. Maintaining that all creatures have intrinsic value—because of how God participates in their being—does not negate the affirmation of unique human dignity. Both values, human dignity and creation's intrinsic value, are to be held together in creative tension.

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[4]Ibid., 157.

Single Evolutionary History

The universe is one. This tenet may be discussed on various levels, from different starting points. Rahner began with the relationship between matter and spirit. It is easy to give in to the temptation to regard human bodies as connected to the Earth and the rest of creation, while the spirits or souls of these bodies soar in a pure world beyond the bonds of matter. This dualism, while affirming complexity, manages it by elevating one dimension of life to the level of the divine, and reducing the other to nothing or to the demonic. But as evolution illustrates, spirit has emerged from matter. We can further make the claim that it is intrinsic to matter that it develops toward spirit. Matter and spirit, though distinct, are not separate; both make up one world. They share one common history in which matter has evolved toward spirit or consciousness. All of creation is radically and fundamentally one.

Accepting that matter tends toward spirit and that spirit emerged from matter, there is really no strict ontological duality that can be established between the human person and the rest of creation. The environment is not completely other, distinct and separate from ourselves, from which we simply draw resources in order to live, which we now have to repair. Since we are the universe come to self-consciousness, we, and the world from which we have emerged, belong to a single evolutionary history.

Our approach then to the environment is not as absolutely other, but as a profound part of our own selves. The elements that compose whales and stars are the same ones that run through our veins. We are all related in a very intimate way as companions, as family. We are one community, all of us bear a will to live from and for God.

Conclusion

Although this statement from Catholic bishops breaks ground by being one of the first to call attention to the environment, it remains very static and devoid of contemporary ideas such as evolution and

what this paradigm-shifting reality can mean for creation and our being its stewards. Basically, the worldview of the CBCP statement on the environment is traditional: God created the universe, which has an original, untouched and paradisiacal form. Concomitant with the coming of human beings is the widespread destruction of God's created world. Now, there is a call to help repair what we have done and, hopefully, bring it back to the way it was.

As we have seen, several recent ideas, all stemming from a deeper understanding of evolution, affords us with perspectives and values that enrich our estimation of and appreciation for God's creation. From evolution, we can affirm the intrinsic value of God's creatures, the dignity of the human person, and the power and presence of God throughout the single evolutionary history.

All of God's creatures, including humans, share a profound affinity with each other. Perhaps some of these ideas may be incorporated in the future in improving and reformulating the position and teaching of the CBCP regarding creation and our stewardship of the environment.