
The 4th Biennial Conference on Religion and Politics: A new, even braver world... The hope of faith and the hope of politics – In Memory of Benidict XVI, 30 November – 1 December 2023

“Environmentalism Critiqued: Pope Benedict’s use of ‘Human Ecology’ to meet the challenge of Environmentalism as a collectivist ‘political religion’ for a New World Order.”

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"The Church has a responsibility towards creation and she must assert this responsibility in the public sphere. In so doing, she must defend not only earth, water and air as gifts of creation that belong to everyone. She must above all protect mankind from self-destruction. There is need for what might be called a human ecology, correctly understood.

– Pope Benidict XVI, Caritas in Veritate #51 (2009)

Introduction

As the main NGO representative of the Society of Catholic Social Scientists to the United Nations I was honored to meet Pope Benedict on December 7, 2007, at the inaugural meeting of the newly formed Rome Forum of NGOs of Catholic Inspiration. I introduced myself to him and he handed me a rosary with a word of encouragement to carry forward the plan he had just articulated in his address to us, representatives of eighty Catholic Non-Governmental Organizations called to Rome to work more closely with the Holy See to advance authentic human rights and integral human development in international and regional human rights venues:

I encourage you, then, to counter relativism creatively by presenting the great truths about man's innate dignity and the rights which are derived from that dignity.... What is needed, in fact, is a spirit of solidarity conducive for promoting as a body those ethical principles which, by their very nature and their role as the basis of social life, remain non-negotiable.¹

Two years later in his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* Pope Benedict unfurled a creative way to counter relativism in order to represent the great truths about man's innate dignity in a spirit of solidarity conducive for promoting a body of non-negotiable ethical principles. Developing a term first suggested by Saint John Paul II, he wrote that in order to preserve the environment and "protect mankind from self-destruction" that "there is a need for what might be called a human ecology" because the deterioration of nature is closely connected to the moral health of human society. He said a proper understanding of the ecological system is "based on respect for a plan that affects both the health of society and its good relationship with nature"² and that nature (including human nature) contains a "grammar" discernable to human reason "which sets forth ends and criteria for its wise use, not its reckless exploitation."³

The common creatureliness of mankind and the nature provides a common grammar whereby one can read from the "book of nature" which is "one and indivisible" an ethic concerning not only the environment but also "life, sexuality, marriage, the family, social relations... [Therefore] duties towards the environment are linked to our duties towards the human person."⁴ He pointed out the hypocrisy of "uphold one set of duties [i.e., to flora and fauna] while trampling on the other [i.e., those due to the human person]."⁵

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, Address to Member of Catholic-Inspired non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), *L'Osservatore Romano*, pp. 5-6 (12/1/07)

² Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, #51 (2009).

³ *Ibid.* #48.

⁴ *Ibid.* #51.

⁵ *Ibid.*

The full development of this all-encompassing ecological ethic, its first iteration having been begun by Pope John Paul II in *Centesimus Annus*,⁶ earned Pope Benedict the title the “green pope:”

“The Church, like the radical ecologists, sees a tie between the environment, the social, the economy, and political, but adds to it the ethical dimension, in which she perceives a key for changing reality. It is not enough just to recognize these ties; it is also necessary to analyze them and justify them. This will be the task of Benedict XVI, who will earn the title of ‘green pope.’⁷

Pope Benedict recognized the link between genuine human development and the environment. But he also recognized and denounced neo-colonialism under the guise of sham development programs. In his *Apostolic Exhortation, Africae Munus*, he called on the Church to speak out against certain groups acting in consort with NGOs and complicit African leaders to prevent African nations from ordering the development according to their own values so that these international entities could exploit Africa’s natural resources:

...I ask all the members of the Church to work and speak out in favor of an economy that cares for the poor and is resolutely opposed to an unjust order which, under the pretext of reducing poverty, has often helped to aggravate it.... Organized for the creation of wealth in their homelands, and not infrequently with the complicity of those in power in Africa, these groups too often ensure their own prosperity at the expense or the well-being of the local population... [T]he Church must speak out against the unjust order that prevents the people so Africa from consolidating their economies and from developing according to the cultural characteristics.”⁸

Pope Benedict also condemned ideological colonization that “absolutizing nature... considering it more important than the human person... such notions eliminate the difference of identity and worth between the human person and other living things... opening the way to a new paganism tinged with neopaganism.”⁹ This disregard for human dignity, he pointed out, serves to legitimize neo-colonial demographic control programs (requiring contraception, sterilization

⁶ See Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* (1991) #38: “Although people are rightly worried — though much less than they should be — about preserving the natural habitats of the various animal species threatened with extinction, because they realize that each of these species makes its particular contribution to the balance of nature in general, too little effort is made to *safeguard the moral conditions for an authentic “human ecology.”*”

⁷ See forward by Archbishop Jean-Louis Bruges, *Pope Benedict XVI: The Garden of God, Toward a Human Ecology*, edited by Maria Milva Morciano, (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 2014) pp. xii.

⁸ Pope Benedict, “The Church Must Encourage Governments to Protect the Fundamental Goods Which are the Earth and Water,” from Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus* on the Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice, and Peace, November 19, 2011.

⁹ Pope Benedict XVI, “If you Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation,” from Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace, January 1, 2010, #13.

and abortion) that economically developed countries export to developing countries as a form of “cultural progress” and impose in return for developmental aid.¹⁰ Pope Benedict insisted that authentic development must be “integral, that is, it has to promote the good of every man and of the whole man.”¹¹ The good of man, the whole man includes both his body and his soul:

The question of development is closely bound up with our understanding of the human soul, insofar as we often reduce the self to the psyche and confuse the soul’s health with emotional well-being.... Development must include not just material growth but also spiritual growth, since the human person is a ‘unity of body and soul, born of God’s creative love and destined for eternal life.’¹²

Pope Benedict tied authentic human development, i.e., integral development, to Christian understanding of anthropology. However, the term “sustainable development” in international parlance, has no defined meaning.¹³ The following section examines what sustainable development means to different actors: First World environmental NGOs employ the term to justify their intervention anywhere on earth to preserve nature and legally and politically enjoin what they consider uncalled for human development. National leaders in the developing world, on the other hand, use the same term to justify their right to develop all the natural resources of their country for rapid economic growth. Finally, an international wealthy elite use the term to limit the sovereignty of nation states and manage national economies to suit their special interests directly and indirectly (through environmental NGOs and other entities). Sustainable development is a term that conceals the identity of these elite actors and their agenda to impose a collectivist political religion in the service of a new world order. The final sections will show how Pope Benedict XVI has helped to reinvigorate natural law jurisprudence by focusing on the category of relationality in order to countering relativism creatively and blunted the advance of a global directorate hidden in a cloak of green.

¹⁰ Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, (2009), #28.

¹¹ Ibid. #17 citing Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, #14

¹² Ibid. #76.

¹³ See Stephen J. Macekura, *Of the Limits of Growth: The Rise of Global Sustainable Development in the Twentieth Century*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p.312.