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# Toward a Pro-Life Environmental Movement

*Lucia A. Silecchia*

ABSTRACT: In modern times, the secular environmental movement seems to have taken on an anti-life message, in ways both subtle and direct. This anti-human – and often anti-life – view has crept into the heart of the “mainstream” ecological movement with consequences that can be detrimental to both human dignity and to the environment itself. This essay does not aim to analyze the complexities inherent in economic development, demographic predictions, or climatology. Instead, it is a call to reflect carefully and soberly on the troubling moral consequences of grounding respect for the environment in disrespect for the dignity of the human person. The first part of the essay outlines the ways in which the ecological movement has run into conflict with pro-life values. This includes a discussion of both the anti-life *rhetoric* of the ecological movement and illustrative environmental *policies* that may have a detrimental effect on human life. The second part of the discussion sets forth the essential components of a pro-life vision of environmental responsibility and explores how the pro-life movement can enhance and renew the ecological movement.

*“Respect for creation stems from respect  
for human life and dignity.”<sup>1</sup>*

**I**N RECENT YEARS, I have been greatly disappointed as I have watched the modern environmental movement seem to take on an anti-life message, in ways both subtle and direct. That disappointment is the *broad* inspiration for this paper. This tension represents both a significant challenge and opportunity for those of us whose vocation it is to serve on

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<sup>1</sup> Pope John Paul II and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, “*Common Declaration of Pope John Paul II and the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I* (June 10, 2002),” available at [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/speeches/2002/june/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_20020610\\_venice-declaration\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/2002/june/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20020610_venice-declaration_en.html).

university faculties. For young adults today, concern about ecological matters runs very high,<sup>2</sup> with much of that concern highly pessimistic about the future of our planet and cynical about human initiatives to protect it.<sup>3</sup> If that worried interest is tainted by the strong anti-life rhetoric proffered by some sectors of the environmental movement, the consequences for human dignity can be quite harmful. However, if the ecological movement is energetically infused with renewed attention to the dignity of the human person, an enormous opportunity presents itself.

More immediately, the *narrow* inspiration for this paper was a disturbing interchange in *The Washington Post*. Not long ago, *The Post* published an article reporting on a climate study from the London School

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<sup>2</sup> See William Antholis and Stole Talbott, "Leaving a Good Legacy," *Time* (14 June 2010) at p. 24, quoting Sen. Lindsay Graham who commented, "I have been to enough college campuses to know – if you are 30 or younger, this climate issue is not a debate.... It's a value." See also Hart Research Associates, *2010 Survey of America's College Students*, May 2010, at p. 7, conducted on behalf of the Panetta Institute for Public Policy (on file with the author): "When it comes to attitudes toward global warming..., 71% of college students [state] that global warming is a very or somewhat serious problem, compared with 65% of all adults who say the same thing." But there are some recent indications that concerns about the economy have reduced the attention that college students now pay to ecological questions. See *ibid.* at p. 4, noting that concern about global warming has "dropped in part among college students since 2008." For this conflicting perspective, see Laura Feldman et al., "The Climate Change Generation? Survey Analysis of the Perception and Beliefs of Young Americans" (2 March 2010), at p. 2 (on file with the author): "Americans between the ages of 18 and 34 are, for the most part, split on the issue of global warming and, on some indicators, relatively disengaged when compared to older generations." Likewise, at p. 3: "[G]lobal warming is not considered of any greater personal importance to under 35s than it is to those 35 and older." Also at p. 5: "Younger adults are also significantly less likely than their older counterparts to report that their friends are acting in ways to reduce global warming.... [A]mong young people, acting in ways to reduce global warming is not perceived as a dominant social norm or pressure."

<sup>3</sup> See Pew Research Center, "Public Sees a Future Full of Promise and Peril" (22 June 2010), available at <http://people-press.org/report/?pageid=1738>: "People younger than 30 are considerably more pessimistic than older Americans about the environment over the next four decades.... Similarly, a 62% majority of those under 30 expect that the quality of the earth's environment will not improve by 2050, the highest in any age group."

of Economics. In that article the author reported:

A new study by the London School of Economics suggests that, to fight climate change, governments should focus on another pollutant: us. As in babies. New people. Every new life, the report says, is a guarantee of new greenhouse gases, spewed out over decades.... Seen in that light, we might be our own worst emissions.<sup>4</sup>

As I considered what it meant to regard the human person as a mere noxious “pollutant” and offensive “emission,” I was struck by the way in which such an anti-human view has become so much a part of the current dialog on ecological questions – albeit often in a more tactful, subtle way. Five days after the original article presented this negative view of the human person, a “Letter to the Editor” appeared in *The Washington Post* as a response to the climate article. This letter caught my attention for its enthusiastic endorsement of the proposition that humans are highly problematic to planetary health. The letter writer opined:

If there were fewer of us, our only home, Earth, would be a lot less stressed out.... Anyone who has a problem with it should tell me and my children and grandchildren where we are to live once we have trashed this planet.<sup>5</sup>

I could not have been the only one to observe the irony of a letter writer seeking to ensure the benefits of a sound environment for future generations of *her* family by arguing against bringing to birth future generations of *other* people’s families. This raises the convoluted question: “[I]s it logical to take away the opportunity of enjoying the environment from those for whom we profess to save it?”<sup>6</sup> All too often, I fear, environmen

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<sup>4</sup> David A. Fahrenthold, “When it Comes to Pollution, Less (Kids) May be More,” *The Washington Post* (15 September 2009) at A3.

<sup>5</sup> Laidler Campbell, Letter to the Editor, *The Washington Post* (20 September 2009) at A20.

<sup>6</sup> Diane L. Slifer, “Growing Environmental Concerns: Is Population Control the Answer?” in *Villanova Environmental Law Journal* 11 (2000): 111-60, p. 158. A similar irony has been expressed by others. See, e.g. Pamela LeRoy, “Troubled Waters: Population and Water Scarcity,” *Colorado Journal of International Environmental Law & Policy* 6 (1955): 299-344 at p. 326: “[N]atural resources must be used in ways that ensure their availability to future generations; ...early

talists answer this question with a resounding “yes.”

Unfortunately, this view is not a new one, nor is it one held solely by those on the fringe of environmental debates. Rather, in a variety of ways, this anti-human and, often, anti-life view has crept into the heart of the “mainstream” ecological movement. The tragedy of this is two-fold. One is the obvious: I fear that the current well-deserved attention being paid to ecological responsibility will be tainted by this view, resulting in policies, programs, financial incentives, and rhetoric that may threaten the dignity of human life – particularly in those nations whose people are poor, vulnerable, and dependant on the foreign aid that can often come with repressive “strings” attached to it.

Compounding the tragedy, however, is a second point: this conflict is, in many respects, an overstated one.<sup>7</sup> That is, it is not only true that there are many ways in which it is *feasible* to have a truly pro-life environmental movement. In my view, *only* by having a truly pro-life environmental movement can we meet our profound responsibility to the world in which we live.<sup>8</sup> The attacks on human dignity that are often

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stabilization of population size is vital to any development strategy.”

<sup>7</sup> See Steven Bader, “The Perceived Conflict Between Human Rights and Environmental Protection: How Organized Religion Can Reconcile Viewpoints and Promote Sustainable Development,” *Gonzaga Journal of International Law* 13 (2009), available at <http://www.law.gonzaga.edu/gjil/2010/01/the-perceived-conflict-between-human-rights-and-environmental-protection> [unpaginated source]: “There is a perception that... protection of mankind and the planet are in direct conflict with one another. This divergence is further developed in international, domestic, and foreign law.”

<sup>8</sup> As Pope John Paul II noted over two decades ago, “If an appreciation of the value of the human person and of human life is lacking, we will also lose interest in others and in the earth itself.” Pope John Paul II, “Peace With God the Creator, Peace With All of Creation: Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace,” ¶13 (1 January 1990), available at [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_mes\\_19891208\\_xxiii-world-day-for-peace\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace_en.html), hereinafter “Peace With God the Creator.” See also ¶7: “The most profound and serious indication of the moral implications underlying the ecological problem is the lack of respect for life evident in many patterns of environmental pollution.... In these cases pollution or environmental destruction is the result of an unnatural and reductionist vision which at times leads to a genuine contempt for man.” See also Pope Benedict XVI, “If You Want to

proposed by environmentalists harm efforts toward meeting such a goal.

What follows does not aim to analyze the complexities inherent in economic development, demographic predictions, or climatology. These are inquiries that require expert, scientific, and unbiased study. Instead, it is a call to reflect carefully and soberly on the troubling moral consequences of grounding respect for the environment in disrespect for the dignity of the human person.<sup>9</sup>

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Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation: Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace,” ¶12 (1 January 2010), available at [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20091208\\_xliii-world-day-peace\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20091208_xliii-world-day-peace_en.html)), hereinafter “Protect Creation”: “Our duties towards the environment flow from our duties towards the person.” See also “Statement of H.E. Archbishop Renato R. Martino to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development” (4 June 1992), available at <http://conservation.catholic.org/archbishop.htm>, hereinafter “Martino Statement”: “[A]ll ecological programs and all development initiatives must respect the full dignity and freedom of whomever might be affected by such programs.... For the ultimate purpose of environmental and developmental programs is to enhance the quality of human life, to place creation in the fullest way possible at the service of the human family.”

See also Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, “Message to Buddhists for the Feast of Vesakh/Manamatsuri” (2010), ¶3, available at [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/interelg/documents/rc-pc-interelg](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc-pc-interelg), hereinafter “Vesakh Statement”: “Our responsibility to protect nature springs, in fact, from our respect for one another.” See also ¶4: “It is crucial...that we encourage responsibility, while at the same time reaffirming our shared convictions about the inviolability of human life at every stage and in every condition, the dignity of the person and the unique mission of the family, where one learns to love one’s neighbor and to respect nature.” See also Pope Benedict XVI, “Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace, The Human Person: The Heart of Peace” (1 January 2007), ¶8, available at [http://www.vatican.va/holy-father/benedict\\_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_ben\\_xvi\\_mes\\_20061208\\_xi-world-day-peace\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy-father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben_xvi_mes_20061208_xi-world-day-peace_en.html)), hereinafter “The Heart of Peace”: “[H]umanity, if it truly desires peace, must be increasingly conscious of the links between natural ecology, or respect for nature, and human ecology. Experience shows that *disregard for the environment always harms human coexistence*, and vice versa. It becomes more and more evident that there is an inseparable link between peace with creation and peace among men.”

<sup>9</sup> I have previously discussed some of the links between concern for ecology and concern for the human person, particularly for vulnerable human persons who live in poverty. See “‘The Preferential Option for the Poor’: An Opportunity and a

My reflections here will have two parts. First, I would like to address the scope of the problem by outlining the ways in which the ecological movement has run into conflict with pro-life values. This includes a discussion of both the anti-life *rhetoric* of the ecological movement and illustrative environmental *policies* that may have a detrimental effect on human life. The second part of the discussion will set forth the essential components of a pro-life vision of environmental responsibility and explore how the pro-life movement can enhance and renew the ecological movement.

#### I. THE SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM: HISTORIC AND MODERN CONFLICTS BETWEEN PRO-LIFE AND ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCATES

The idea that ecology and humanity are at odds with each other is an old and unfortunate one.<sup>10</sup> The blame for this perceived disharmony can be

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Challenge for Environmental Decision-making,” *University of St. Thomas Law Journal* 5 (2008): 87-143, also available electronically at [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1441935](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1441935).

<sup>10</sup> See Joel E. Cohen, “Human Population Grows Up” in *A Pivotal Moment: Population, Justice and the Environmental Challenge*, ed. Laurie Mazur (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2009), pp. 27-33 at p. 33, noting that “Cuneiform tablets from 1600 BC show that Babylonians feared the world was already too full of people.” See also Walden Bello, “Understanding the Global Food Crisis” in Mazur, pp. 179-92 at p. 179, reporting that: “From Thomas Malthus to Paul Ehrlich, history echos with warnings that population growth will inevitably outstrip agricultural capacity, causing famine and social collapse.... [T]he worst predictions have proved unfounded.” See also “Australian Scientist Gives Human Race Another 100 Years,” *Newstex Web Blogs* (24 June 2010), citing the prediction by Prof. Frank Fenner that “humans had about 100 years left before we make ourselves extinct.... Homo sapiens will become extinct, perhaps within 100 years. A lot of other animals will, too. It’s an irreversible situation.... Mitigation would slow things down a bit, but there are too many people here already.... The belief that overpopulation causes stress due to a lack of resources has been around for 212 years – ever since Thomas Malthus noticed that population appeared to rise and fall in relation to distinct events.” See also Vanessa Baird, “Too Many People?” in *New Internationalist* (Jan./Feb. 2010) at p. 5: “Talk of ‘overpopulation’ has been with us for some time. Already in 1798, when there were a mere 978 million people in the world, mathematician Thomas Malthus was warning of an impending catastrophe.... Often the cause of concern is the spread at which others – be they people of other races or social classes or

found on all sides.<sup>11</sup> In part this has resulted from the failure of many to acknowledge that the human person – unique in dignity and responsibility – is also a part of natural creation. Those who fail to recognize the human person as an integral participant in and part of the delicate natural environment have contributed greatly to this destructive disunion.

In 1967, the historian Lynn White famously laid the blame for the earth's ecological woes at the feet of Christianity. He argued that Christianity “established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends.”<sup>12</sup> He went on to accuse Christianity of “bear[ing] a huge burden of guilt”<sup>13</sup> for arguing that “[w]e are superior to nature, contemptuous of it, willing to use it for our slightest whim.”<sup>14</sup> In my view, White over-stated his claim and misread some basic tenets of the Judeo-Christian tradition. However, the biblical challenge to exercise dominion in and stewardship over creation *has* been mishandled by many.<sup>15</sup> The error of an approach that emphasizes

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religion's or political allegiances – are reproducing themselves, threatening, presumably, to disturb the well being of whatever dominant group the commentator belongs to.”

<sup>11</sup> See, e.g., Walter E. Grazer, “Environmental Justice: A Catholic Voice,” *AM* (19 January 2004) at p. 15: “Extremes need to be resisted. Some espouse an almost divine status for nature, without any reference to the unique dignity of the human person or the need for development. Others embrace a strictly utilitarian view of nature. The church recognizes, on the other hand, that humans are part of nature. It neither divinizes nature nor embraces a materialistic view. No environmental ethic will be satisfactory without a clearer perspective on the place of humans within nature and a better understanding of the moral responsibilities of caring for creation.”

<sup>12</sup> Lynn White, Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” *Science* 155 (March 10, 1967): 1203-07, at p. 1205.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* at p. 1206.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Bader, *op. cit.*, briefly outlines the wide variety of ecological harms in today's world, many with human origins, stating: “Human behavior has led to widespread environmental problems around the globe. More than one billion people on earth do not have access to safe drinking water, and around 2.6 billion do not have essential sanitation assistance. It is estimated that two million children die from consumption of polluted water every year. Air pollution, a result of human

aggressive and destructive domination over sober stewardship is being recognized more each day as many religious leaders and ethicists rethink the parameters of responsible stewardship.<sup>16</sup>

More dangerous, however, has been the rhetoric at play that suggests the opposite – that there is nothing unique about the human person. This view proposes that humans are, at best, the mere equal of other facets of creation and, at worst, a danger to a romanticized view of the natural world that, therefore, must be reduced, controlled, and harshly reined in as far as possible. Because words and their use truly matter, I fear that the prevalence of such rhetoric clouds the ability of even well-meaning ecologists to preserve the unique dignity and respect due to the human person.<sup>17</sup>

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activity, is estimated to cause three million deaths per year. Indoor air pollution, caused by the indoor burning of fuels, leads to 2.8 million of these annual deaths. Lead emissions, caused by the burning of leaded fuel and other industrial activities, have been found to increase blood pressure, as well as the risk of heart attack and stroke.... Currently, more than one billion people suffer from malnourishment. Humanity is unable to produce grain at a level needed to feed the global population; approximately 70 percent of Earth's fisheries have been dilapidated due to aggressive and unsustainable harvesting; and 25 billion tons of topsoil is lost each year....”

<sup>16</sup> See “Protect Creation,” §1: “Man’s inhumanity to man has given rise to numerous threats to peace and to authentic and integral human development – wars, international and regional conflicts, acts of terrorism, and violations of human rights. Yet no less troubling are the threats arising from the neglect – if not downright misuse – of the earth and the natural goods that God has given us.” See also ¶6: “Human beings let themselves be mastered by selfishness; they misunderstand the meaning of God’s command and exploited creation out of a desire to exercise absolute dominion over it. But the true meaning of God’s original command...was not a simple conferral of authority, but rather a summons to responsibility.”

<sup>17</sup> See U.S. Catholic Conference, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994), hereinafter *Catechism*, p. 88: “Man is the summit of the Creator’s work, as the inspired account expresses by clearly distinguishing the creature of man from other creatures.” See also Marjorie Keenan, *Care For Creation: Human Activity and the Environment* (Rome IT: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2000), p. 14: “There can be no doubt: the human person stands out from the rest of created beings. While all of creation bears the mark of its Creator, ...there is an urgent and consistent insistence on the remarkable distinctiveness of this last act of creation.”

At first, this rhetoric seemed limited to the fringe of the ecological movement. In the past, this anti-human attitude may have been the province of so-called “deep ecologists” who denied that there is any distinction between the human person and the rest of creation.<sup>18</sup> Such “[d]eep ecologists...hold that humans are not basically different from the material world around them. For them, nature is first and foremost, while humans, far from having dominion or being stewards, are simply included in nature alongside everything else.”<sup>19</sup> Those who hold this view would, naturally, marginalize the role of humanity in the order of creation.

In the past, this view was the province of groups and individuals who were easily identified as having a radical environmental agenda. For example, Zero Population Growth, Inc., was founded in 1969. Its founder, Richard Bowers, tied population control (including abortion) to the preservation of the environment.<sup>20</sup> Since then,

over the years, there have been many radical statements. In the infamous words of a National Park Service ecologist, “We have become a plague upon ourselves and upon the earth... Until such time as *homo sapiens* should decide to rejoin nature, some of us can only hope for the right virus to come along. A former leader of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals once declared that humans have grown like a cancer; we’re the

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See also Michael S. Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), cautioning readers that “extreme ecocentrism is clearly inconsistent with a Hebrew and Christian approach which regards human life as closest in form and purpose to the life of God, and which therefore places supreme moral value on human person and communities” (p. 112).

<sup>18</sup> See generally Anne Barbeau Gardiner, “Deep Ecology and the Culture of Death,” *Life and Learning* 17 (2007): 179-90 at p. 179, offering a comprehensive overview of the anti-life premises upon which the “deep ecology” movement is based.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* at p. 180.

<sup>20</sup> Mary Ziegler, “The Framing of a Right to Choose: *Roe v. Wade* and the Changing Debate on Abortion Law,” *Law & Historical Review* 27 (2009): 281-330, at p. 294: “ZPG primarily used environmental arguments to promote population policies.” See also p. 295: “ZPG activists increasingly campaigned for better access to alternative reproductive techniques as a tool to preserve the environment and achieve zero population growth.... [A]bortion was seen to be one such technique.”

biggest blight on the face of the earth.<sup>21</sup>

Were this rhetoric to remain the province of isolated individuals or small groups within the ecological movement, the danger would not be so great. In many ways, shocking statements pose far less of a danger because they can be evaluated on their face and seen for what they are. However, today's anti-life rhetoric has become, perhaps, less shocking but more subtlety pervasive to the point where it may come to be considered the norm. To today's major ecologists, "people are seen as the threats to the environment instead of stewards of creation."<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately, as time goes by, the view is often repeated that "[t]he proclaimed corollary of population growth is environmental degradation and deterioration."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Anne Applebaum, "Anti-Climate Change, Anti-Human," *The Washington Post* (15 December 2009) at A29.

<sup>22</sup>Mark McClusky, "People as Pollution?" available online at <http://www.usccb.org/prolife/publicat/lifeissues/122309.shtml>. See also Thomas Wire, "Fewer Emitters, Lower Emissions, Less Cost: Reducing Future Carbon Emissions by Investing in Family Planning – a Cost/Benefit Analysis" (August 2009), on file with the author, at p. 1: "[F]rom the cost-benefit analysis, it has been found that family planning...is more cost-effective than most low-carbon technologies. It is recommended that an optimum amount of carbon-reducing methods includes family planning as one of the primary methods." See also *ibid.*, p. 28: "[F]amily planning is considerably cheaper than many low carbon technologies.... [F]amily planning is a cost-effective tool in reducing carbon emissions."

<sup>23</sup> Omar Saleem, "'Be Fruitful, and Multiple, and Replenish the Earth, and Subdue It': Third World Population Growth and the Environment," *Georgetown International Environmental Law Review* 8 (1995): 1-44 at p. 2. See also p. 7: "Along with degradation of natural resources and destruction of the environment, population experts assert that the staggering population increase will cause economic stagnation, political instability, poverty, malnutrition, and civil conflict." For a similar sentiment, see "Statement of International Planned Parenthood President, Alexander Sanger, to the Plenary Session of the ICPD" (13 September 1994), available online at <http://www.un.org/popin/icpd/conference/ngo/940913133849.html>: "Denying women power over their own bodies has...fueled an ecological crisis." See also William Riferson, "Planet Earth is Getting Too Crowded," *New York Newsday* (22 April 2010) at A37: "[T]he planet is at greater environmental risk today than it was in 1970. The reason is simple: Population growth has outpaced the green movement."

Thus, ecologists and advocates say such things as can be found in the following direct quotations:

We must consider the effect that the availability of birth control – and, yes, even abortion – will have on ameliorating this trend, as scientists agree that development and implementation of green technologies aren't enough.<sup>24</sup>

A planetary law, such as China's one-child policy, is the only way to reverse the disastrous global birthrate currently, which is one million births every four days. The world's other species, vegetation, resources, oceans, arable land, water supplies and atmosphere are being destroyed and pushed out of existence.... Ironically, China, despite its dirty coal plants, is the world's leader in terms of fashioning policy to combat environmental degradation, thanks to its one-child-only edict.<sup>25</sup>

If the world population continues to grow, the Earth will run out of resources and the environment will not be able to sustain the number of people. The assumption for many is that the more inhabitants there are on Earth, the more the Earth's resources will be depleted and, therefore, increased environmental problems will result.<sup>26</sup>

With nearly 79 million newcomers on our planet each year it would behoove us to apply a systems approach in order to curb overpopulation which

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<sup>24</sup> Joni Baird, "Reproductive Rights Go Green," *The Humanist* (September-October 2009), p. 18.

<sup>25</sup> Diane Francis, "The Real Inconvenient Truth," *Financial Post* (8 December 2009). The author goes on to state: "China has proven that birth restriction is smart policy. Its middle class grows, all its citizens have housing, health care, education and food, and the one out of five human beings who live there are not overpopulating the planet." See also Robert Engelman, "Fair Weather, Lasting World" in Mazur, pp. 95-107 at p. 95: "[A] spokesman for the government of China...noted at a United Nations climate meeting that his country's one-child population policy has saved the planet's atmosphere 1.3 billion tons per year of [carbon dioxide]." But see Bader, op. cit., noting that: "Only one percent of Chinese urban citizens breathe air considered safe by international standards. China's Ministry of Health reports that due to pollution, cancer is the nation's leading cause of death. Almost 500 million Chinese citizens do not have access to portable drinking water."

<sup>26</sup> Slifer, op. cit., p. 111.

threatens our ecosystem and, consequently, humanity.<sup>27</sup>

If you live in Britain or the U.S. in 2010, there is nothing you can do to reduce your impact on the environment that even comes close to the effects of having one fewer child.<sup>28</sup>

One of the leading factors contributing to the destruction of the earth is the reproductive “success” of *homo sapiens*.<sup>29</sup>

No goal is more crucial to healing the global environment than stabilizing human population.<sup>30</sup>

Reducing local overpopulation decreases vulnerability to near-term environmental and other stresses.... [O]ver the long-term, it relieves climate change and other pressures on the global environment.<sup>31</sup>

Unless we do more to encourage smaller families and prevent unwanted pregnancies, it’s hard to envision a good outcome.... If we truly love the Earth, the large unmet need for family planning in the world must be met.<sup>32</sup>

The achievement of sustainable development requires that the interrelationships between population, resources, the environment and development be fully recognized, properly managed and brought into a harmonious balance. Because population is expected to increase substantially, especially in developing countries, the Programme of Action recognizes the usefulness of achieving a lower population growth as soon as possible.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Baird, op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>28</sup> Oliver Burkeman, “If You Care About This..., Don’t Have One of These, *The Guardian* (13 February 2010) at p. 30.

<sup>29</sup> Anne Ketover, “Fouling Our Own Nest: Rapid Population Growth and Its Effect on the Environment,” *Tulane Environmental Law Journal* 7 (1994): 431-67 at p. 432.

<sup>30</sup> Albert Gore, *Earth in the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit* (Boston MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1992), p. 307.

<sup>31</sup> Diarmid Campbell-Lendrum & Manjula Lusti-Narasimhan, “Taking the Heat Out of the Population and Climate Debate,” *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* 87 (2009): 807 (on file with the author).

<sup>32</sup> Riferson, op. cit., at A37.

<sup>33</sup> U.N. Dept. of Economic and Social Affairs, “Population Challenges and Development Goals” (2005), p. 37, available at <http://www.un.org/>

Let's now look at an argument that is very commonly made against the efforts to eradicate poverty, namely, that doing so will have great ecological costs in terms of overpopulation.... Reductions in poverty increase the human population since those who escape extreme poverty will tend to live longer lives.... [C]hildren who survive will reproduce, thereby compounding the problem.... Proponents of this view admit that poverty is deplorable, but at least it has the advantage of controlling population growth.<sup>34</sup>

As rhetoric such as this is repeated, it creates a dangerously anti-life climate in which environmental decision-making takes place. In much of this rhetoric, no clear distinction is drawn between abortion and other means of slowing population growth. Much of this is done with the hope of appealing to those who might recognize the immorality of abortion but may not find other methods of population control to be as problematic. I do not intend to ignore this distinction. But I would argue that, for several reasons, a focus on it is not as relevant as some may think. First, much anti-life rhetoric in this context is vague as to the precise methods to be used to control population, thereby suggesting that an unlimited and wide range of morally suspect techniques may be used to accomplish this reduction.<sup>35</sup> Second, even if the information provided is not vague on its

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[esa/population/publications/pop\\_challenges/Population\\_Challenges.pdf](#), hereinafter "Population Challenges." The recommendations advocate "integrating population into development and environment programs that take into account patterns of production and consumption and seek to bring about population trends consistent with the achievement of sustainable development and the improvement of the quality of life."

<sup>34</sup> Thomas Pogge, "Poverty, Climate Change, and Overpopulation," *Georgia Journal of International & Comparative Law* 38 (2010): 525-42 at p. 531. This view contradicts the more common view that reduction in poverty correlates with a reduction in population.

<sup>35</sup> For a graphic description of the abuses inherent in China's "one child" policy, see generally Hannah A. Saona, "The Protection of Reproductive Rights Under International Law: The Bush Administration's Policy Shift and China's Family Planning Practices," *Pacific Rim Law & Policy Journal* 13 (2004): 229-56 at pp. 236-39. See also Thomas L. Hunker, "Generational Genocide: Coercive Population Control as a Basis for Asylum in the United States," *Journal of Transnational Law & Policy* 15 (2005): 131-51 at p. 132: "[S]ome methods of dealing with increasing populations have led to grave human rights abuses involving forced abortions and sterilizations."

face, it is often unreliable. Indeed, “[d]espite certain denials, abortion (surgical and pharmaceutical) is being promoted more and more openly or in a hidden way as a method of population control. This tendency is true even of organizations which, when they began, did not have abortion as part of their program.”<sup>36</sup> Unbeknownst to many, “infanticide is still practiced in certain countries as a method for population control. Girls are more frequently the innocent victims.”<sup>37</sup> Naturally, the rhetoric on this issue is far more benignly framed by those who advocate anti-life policies as solutions to the ecological problems that face our world.

Domestically, it is critically important to note the active participation of influential environmental and ecology groups in advocacy for abortion rights.<sup>38</sup> Unfortunately, the involvement of such groups in abortion advocacy may be largely unknown to their supporters. One of the most chillingly illustrative examples of this can be found in an *amici curiae*

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<sup>36</sup> Pontifical Council for the Family, “Ethical and Pastoral Dimensions of Population Trends” (13 May 1994), available at <http://www.ewtn.com/library/curia/pcfrend.htm>, hereinafter “Ethical and Pastoral Dimensions of Population Trends”: “In developed countries, some women consider abortion as a fallback solution in the case of contraception failure. In developing countries there is a tendency to facilitate easier access to abortion as an effective method of population control.” See also Hunker, *op. cit.*, p. 135: “The Chinese position on physically coerced abortion and sterilization consists of the Central Government formally forbidding the practices, while local cadres, under pressure to meet strict quotas and targets, administer forced abortions and sterilizations with near impunity” and p. 145: “The UNFPA [United Nations Population Fund]...claims not to provide abortion related services. However, many members of Congress find their denials hard to believe, especially in light of the fact that UNFPA shares office space with local Chinese population control cadres.... U.N. watchdog groups also express distrust of the UNFPA’s claimed anti-abortion policy in light of the fact that its ‘reproductive health kits’ include vacuum aspirators, IUD’s, and morning after pills.”

<sup>37</sup> “Ethical and Pastoral Dimensions of Population Trends.”

<sup>38</sup> See Slifer, *op. cit.*, p. 112: “[P]opulation control has spurred many interesting alliances, bringing together environmental and family planning special interest groups.” For a discussion of the role of similar NGOs in the international arena, see generally Patricia Waak, “Shaping a Sustainable Planet: The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations,” *Colorado Journal of International Environmental Law & Policy* 6 (1995): 345-62, at p. 345.

brief<sup>39</sup> filed by a number of prominent environmental groups, including the Sierra Club, the Worldwatch Institute, Population-Environment Balance, and the Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation, in support of the appellees in *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services*.<sup>40</sup> The case involved the constitutionality of a Missouri statute that, among other things:

prohibits the use of public employees and facilities to perform or assist abortions not necessary to save the mother's life...and ...makes it unlawful to use public funds, employees, or facilities for the purpose of "encouraging or counseling" a woman to have an abortion not necessary to save her life.<sup>41</sup>

The environmental groups filed a vigorous argument that refusing to use public resources to counsel the women of Missouri to have abortions would somehow have globally devastating environmental consequences. They wrote:

Protecting a woman's fundamental right to choose, without coercion, whether or not to have an abortion, and her right to have access to information about abortion are essential. Regardless of one's personal views, the fact remains that if abortion were not an option, the strains on the environment would be even greater because the population would be increasing substantially faster.... The decision in this case could have worldwide ramifications.<sup>42</sup>

As the *amici's* argument unfolded, it provides a perfect example of the anti-life agenda of many modern environmental advocates by arguing that, for ecological reasons, "it is essential that women have full access to information about all their reproductive options, including abortion."<sup>43</sup> In a similar vein, it was argued that a constant factor underlying the degradation of the environment is the world's exploding population,

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<sup>39</sup> *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services*, No. 88-605, Brief for Population-Environment Balance *et al.* as *Amici Curiae* Supporting Appellees (1989), available at 189 WL 1127735 (U.S.), hereafter "*Amici Curiae Brief*."

<sup>40</sup> *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services*, 492 U.S. 490 (1989).

<sup>41</sup> Mo. Rev. Stat. §§ 188.205, 188.210, 188.215 (1986).

<sup>42</sup> *Amici Curiae Brief*, at p. 2.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* at p. 5.

because “[i]f abortion were not an option, the population would be increasing even faster.”<sup>44</sup> While the *amici* conceded that “the number of births affected by the Missouri law at issue will not, in itself, have a significant impact on environmental problems,”<sup>45</sup> they still claimed that the restrictions “are likely to have a significant impact not only on individuals and families, but also on population growth and the environment.”<sup>46</sup> Likewise, the *amici* summarized their argument by saying:

[V]oluntary efforts to slow population growth are essential to the preservation of the domestic and the global environment.... Women need access to full information about their reproductive choices so that they can control their lives which will, in turn, slow population growth and make it possible to protect the environment.<sup>47</sup>

While this brief is only one public example of anti-life environmental advocacy, this advocacy is certainly consistent with the Sierra Club’s official view of abortion as “an acceptable means of controlling population growth.”<sup>48</sup> Indeed, the Sierra Club proudly touts the fact that it is “a pro-choice organization”<sup>49</sup> working at “avoiding unwanted births.”<sup>50</sup> The

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* at p. 13. The *amici* then make the link between the state statute and worldwide demographics by stating: “The withdrawal of a woman’s fundamental right to choose to have an abortion, urged by the State of Missouri and the United States, will not only set back family planning in this country, it will also discourage efforts in other countries, particularly developing countries that may view the United States as a model, to improve women’s and children’s health and help to control development and population growth by legalizing abortion” (*ibid.* at p. 14).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* at p. 16.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* at pp. 21-22.

<sup>48</sup> Kim A. Lawton, “Is There Room for Pro-life Environmentalists?” in *Christianity Today* 34 (24 September 1990): 46-47 at p. 47.

<sup>49</sup> See <http://www.sierraclub.org/population/faq>.

<sup>50</sup> “Policy Statement of the Sierra Club Board of Directors,” adopted 17 November 2007, available at <http://www.sierraclub.org/policy/conservation/population.pdf>.

Sierra Club, along with other environmental groups, enthusiastically hailed President Obama's reversal of the Mexico City Policy in 2010.<sup>51</sup> While by no means the unanimous consensus of all environmental groups,<sup>52</sup> this trend is disturbing.

Again, ecology groups will often refrain from using the word "abortion" explicitly and instead use broader terms to advocate population control. In its publications the Audubon Society, for example, says such things as this: "Audubon has worked to strengthen U.S. leadership in the arena of international family planning"<sup>53</sup> and "call or write Congress in support of effective international family planning."<sup>54</sup> Neither of these statements explicitly endorses abortion. Yet, when the same publication

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<sup>51</sup> See [http://www.sierraclub.org/population/global\\_gag\\_rule/](http://www.sierraclub.org/population/global_gag_rule/): "On January 23, 2009, President Barack Obama took a major step forward in ensuring the health and well-being of women, families, and the environment by repealing the Global Gag Rule. The President also announced his intention to release Congressionally-approved funding to UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, as soon as it is made available. U.S. support of UNFPA, the largest multilateral source of international family planning assistance, has been withheld for the past seven years. During that time, the Fund has not received a total of \$244 million in U.S. funding.

"One of the most effective ways to address population growth and work to achieve larger global sustainable development goals is to increase access to voluntary family planning programs and services – at home and abroad. When women and men can choose the size and spacing of their families, they tend to have smaller, healthier families. This has a ripple effect that benefits communities socially, economically, and environmentally.

"Sierra Club applauds President Obama for taking a strong stand on behalf of voluntary family planning programs around the world. This recent action is critical to restoring America's image as a leader on global health issues."

For further discussion of the Mexico City Policy, see generally Noam N. Levey, "Obama Lifts Ban on Abortion-Linked Aid," *Los Angeles Times* (24 January 2009) at A11.

<sup>52</sup> See Lawton, *op. cit.*, p. 47, reporting that the National Right to Life Committee has identified the Conservation Foundation, Environmental Defense Fund, Green Peace, National Parks and Conservation Center, Trout Unlimited, and the World Wildlife Foundation as "not involved in "pro-abortion lobbying."

<sup>53</sup> Audubon Society, "Population and Habitat: Making the Connection," hereinafter "*Making the Connection*", [www.audubonpopulation.org](http://www.audubonpopulation.org).

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

urges human population control to save butterflies<sup>55</sup> and simultaneously includes a statement by the Audubon Society president that “[h]uman population growth is the most pressing environmental problem facing the U.S. and the world,”<sup>56</sup> it is easy to get the impression that the value of the human person *vis-à-vis* other parts of creation is not as well emphasized as it should be.

Internationally, the anti-life perspective is reflected in the tendency to link foreign aid to developing countries with population reduction programs.<sup>57</sup> Commentators have often noted that development aid is often coercively pro-population reduction.<sup>58</sup> For political reasons, the explicit

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., statement of John Flicker.

<sup>57</sup> See Alok Jha, “Crowd Control: Alok Jha on Why Malthus Was Wrong to Fear A Population Explosion,” a review of Fred Pearce, *Mass Migration, Ageing Nations, and the Coming Population Crash* in *The Guardian* (27 March 2010) at p. 8: “By the 1950s, population controllers were everywhere, wringing their hands in NGOs and United Nations agencies, worrying about the coming Malthusian population catastrophe, looking to the poorest parts of the world to curb the population growth. Mass US-funded family planning programs were targeted at a number of countries, with foreign aid and even trade sometimes dependent on meeting western targets. In India, the government put pressure on citizens to get sterilized, while China’s one-child policy led to brutal forced abortions.”

See also Sreram Chaulia, “Go Forth and Multiply?” in *The Financial Express* (29 July 2010): “Aldous Huxley...and Paul Ehrlich... advocat[ed] strict birth control (including forced sterilization and abortion) as a due imperative in decolonized countries. They too insisted that western food aid be predicated on population reduction blueprints. A whole bureaucracy of international organizations and charities was organized from the 1970s under the umbrella of the United Nations Fund for Population (UNFPA) to aggressively peddle family planning solutions in Africa, Latin America and Asia.”

<sup>58</sup> Sarah Helena Lord, Comment, “The Nicaraguan Abortion Ban: Killing in Defense of Life,” *North Carolina Law Review* 87 (2009) 537–620, at pp. 580-81: “As one can imagine, the need to receive aid, albeit aid conditioned on the fulfillment of the donor’s foreign policy objective, is greater for Nicaragua and other developing nations than in the more developed countries. However, to date, the use of economic coercion has proven ineffective at inciting a policy change in Nicaragua. In fact, Nicaragua overwhelmingly renewed the ban on abortion in August 2007, ignoring thinly veiled threats from various donor nations. In particular, Sweden has been vocal in denouncing the law and announced that it

focus has often been on artificial birth control rather than directly on abortion, because the former is more politically palatable.<sup>59</sup> Yet, today:

Many contemporary governments have implemented population control measures and have done so with total disregard for the impact on the dignity or cultural heritage of their own people. Historically, the only type of population control instituted by governments were those which increased nations' populations. Only recently has population control been instituted in order to decrease population.<sup>60</sup>

Most often, “developed countries define for other countries what must be, from their point of view, ‘sustainable development.’ ... [C]ertain rich countries and major international organizations are willing to help these countries, but on one condition – that they accept programs for the systematic control of their births.”<sup>61</sup> In fact, the United Nation’s Popula

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was withdrawing aid from Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Honduras. In response, Nicaragua, which receives \$21 million a year from Sweden, has accused Sweden of ‘interfering in Nicaragua’s domestic affairs and acting like a proconsul by conditioning the aid on permitting abortion.’ Nicaragua has also fended off criticism from the Netherlands and other liberal European powers that invest in or otherwise aid the country.”

See also Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* ¶25 (30 December 1987), available at [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_30121987\\_sollicitudo-rei-socialis\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis_en.html)): “[I]t is very alarming to see governments in many countries launching systematic campaigns against birth, contrary not only to the cultural and religious identity of the countries themselves but also contrary to the nature of true development. It often happens that these campaigns are the result of pressure and financing coming from abroad, and in some cases they are made a condition for the granting of financial and economic aid and assistance.... [T]here is an absolute lack of respect for the freedom of choice of the parties involved, men and women often subjected to intolerable pressures...in order to force them to submit to this new form of oppression. It is the poorest populations which suffer such mistreatment, and this sometimes leads to a tendency toward a form of racism.”

<sup>59</sup> See Ziegler, op. cit., p. 283: “Because some African-Americans identified population control reforms with racism, organizations that favored legalized abortion had reason to set aside population control arguments in order to avoid being accused of racism themselves.”

<sup>60</sup> Slifer, op. cit., pp. 125-26.

<sup>61</sup> “Ethical and Pastoral Dimensions of Population Trends.” See also *ibid.*:

tion Fund has reportedly received some of its largest contributions from the Netherlands, Japan, the United Kingdom, Sweden, and Denmark.<sup>62</sup> Yet, “[t]he irony...is that many of these countries encourage population growth at home.”<sup>63</sup>

One must be suspicious of the motives for attempting to increase population in wealthier nations – where consumption is the greatest – while aggressively reducing it among the poor. In the past, there may have been a logical (albeit not moral) consistency to this approach if the goal was to relieve localized ecological problems such as scarce and polluted

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“[T]here is a vast network of wealthy organizations which direct their efforts toward reducing population. In different degrees these organizations share a similar perspective, and they publically commend anti-natalist policies.”

<sup>62</sup> Bader, op. cit.

<sup>63</sup> Bader, op. cit., notes that “Western European nations also recognize a fundamental right to procreate, and many aggressively encourage population growth due to concern that the low European birth rate will result in a smaller and weaker economy in the future, and the displacement of many European cultures” [unpaginated source].

Indeed many wealthy countries that advocate or support aggressive population control in the developing world are growing nervous about their own aging and/or declining population: “[A]nxiety about population decline and its adverse impacts in dependency ratios, pension funds, economic productivity, size of domestic markets and militaries have gripped *inter alia*, Australia, France, Russia, Japan, Germany, Italy, Hungary and Ukraine. Even the world’s most populated country, China, is beset with predictions of a sharp fall in birth rates from 2020 onwards due to the ‘One Child’ norm and individual choices of households that are getting wealthier. In ageing societies, ‘under-population’ is a bigger scare than overpopulation.” Chaulia, op. cit.

Pope Benedict XVI has also expressed concerns about this demographic trend in “Letter of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Participants in the Twelfth Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Academy of the Social Science” (27 April 2006), available at [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/letters/2006/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_let\\_20060427\\_social-sciences\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/letters/2006/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20060427_social-sciences_en.html)): “While the statistics of population growth are indeed open to varying interpretations, there is general agreement that we are witnessing on a planetary level, and in the developed countries in particular, two significant and interconnected trends: on the one hand, an increase in life expectancy, and, on the other, a decrease in birth rates. As societies are growing older, many nations or groups of nations lack a sufficient number of young people to renew their population.”

drinking water or depleted farmland.<sup>64</sup>

However, with environmentalists directing their primary focus to climate change on the planetary level, these arguments no longer even have a logical consistency.<sup>65</sup> Moral issues aside, the enthusiastic attention paid to population reduction among poor under-consumers seems logically misplaced.<sup>66</sup> In spite of this, the alliance between ecologists and population control advocates seem to grow ever stronger – even though “[p]opulation control by itself does not lead to environmental sustainability or the alleviation of poverty and conflict. Coercive and experimental fertility control can make family planning a force of women’s victimization rather than liberation.”<sup>67</sup> Even population control advocates acknowl-

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<sup>64</sup> Of course, water supply remains a matter of serious concern. See LeRoy, p. 300: “Competition and disputes over freshwater resources have been taking place for centuries.... With the world’s population growing by at least 86 million people each year, tensions are escalating in the face of real and impending shortages of fresh, clean water. The growing number of people experiencing water stress and scarcity has important implications for international security.” Ibid., p. 314: “Deteriorating water quality is a critical problem in developing countries, where hundreds of millions of people lack access to clean drinking waters without wastewater treatment. In many urban areas people compete for access to polluted water to satisfy their drinking needs.”

<sup>65</sup> See Pontificia Academia Scientiarum, “Population & Resources: A Report” (1994), hereinafter “Population Report,” pp. 42-43: “Development, production and industrialization have so far been linked to a deterioration of the environment at the local, regional, and global levels.... Whereas in the past the local effects of human activities were especially evident and the deterioration of the environment often came to be accepted as...necessary...to the process of developments, in recent times long range effects of contamination have become evident in a growing measure.”

<sup>66</sup> See “Statement from the Bishops Conference of England and Wales on the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development,” in *Briefing* (28 May 1992), at p. 19: “In the wealthy North, with its disproportionate consumption of resources and falling population, it is easy to regard the South’s rapid population increase as the major threat. Yet rapid population growth is in fact largely a symptom, and effect of poverty, rather than a cause of poverty.... Attempts by the North to urge population control as the solution not only stigmatize the South as irresponsible or incompetent, but obscure the North’s own responsibility for contributing to the South’s increasing and debilitating poverty.”

<sup>67</sup> Asoka Bandarage, “Control Cash, Not People,” *The Ecologist* (Oct. 2008): 58.

edge this danger when they warn that “using the need to reduce climate change as a justification for curbing the fertility of individual women at best provokes controversy and, at worst, provides a mandate to suppress individual freedom.”<sup>68</sup>

## II. LOOKING TO THE FUTURE: A POSITIVE VISION OF A PRO-LIFE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT

Yet, in spite of the negative view of the human person that is, unfortunately, driving much environmental activism, there is hope. As one commentator noted, “[b]uilding up a culture of life is the single most important way to build a culture that respects the environment.”<sup>69</sup> I agree. I would also argue that a pro-life vision of the human person is not only possible but *necessary* for a truly helpful, hopeful environmental program either domestically or internationally.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, failing to do so can harm genuine efforts at addressing environmental harms because it can create a false sense of simple security:

By relying on population control as the answer to environmental concerns, population control becomes a crutch that masks real problems. To join environmental concerns to population control advocacy, whatever the motivations of the proponents may be, leads to the false hypothesis that population control alone will solve the environmental problems of the world. This often means the neglect of real solutions, and environmental issues become merely another part of the political rhetoric of population control.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Campbell-Lendrum & Lusti-Narasimhan, at p. 807.

<sup>69</sup> “Pro-Life Group Marks 40th Anniversary of Earth Day with Campaign Celebrating Life,” quoting Brian Burch, President of the CatholicVote.org Education Fund, available at <http://www.lifesitenews.com.ldn/printerfriendly.html?articleid=10041211>).

<sup>70</sup> See Bader, “[H]uman rights and environmental protection are not incompatible, and one does not need to be sacrificed for the other” [unpaginated source].

<sup>71</sup> Slifer, p. 159. See also *ibid.*, p. 155: “An over-reliance on birth reductions as the primary solution to the problem of environmental degradation has existed. This over-reliance, coupled with the urgency of ‘doomsday’ predictions, has led to the preclusion of evaluating and adopting more balanced and rational strategies for dealing with the environmental problems of the world.”

Now is not the time for well-intentioned ecologists to be lulled into the false belief that a simplistic population-based solution exists to resolve difficult environmental problems. Instead, a more complex and sacrificial approach is needed, an approach that truly respects the dignity of the human person.

What, then, are the basic elements of a pro-life environmental movement? I would argue that there are five. A fruitful contribution that pro-life advocates may make is to interject these basic five principles into ecological discussions when those discussions begin to turn against the dignity of the human person.

1. *The unique place of the human person in creation must be reasserted.* To say that the human person is no different from any other part of creation, as some ecologists would do, is actually to exonerate humans from our unique responsibility to nature and thus harm, not help, creation. As the only part of creation with freedom of the will and a capacity for moral reasoning, humans are uniquely responsible to be stewards of creation.<sup>72</sup> Indeed:

[t]he determining factor in conserving the environment is the human person; the only one who is conscious of itself and also gifted with the intelligence to explore, the wisdom to utilize and protect its surroundings and finally capable of being responsible for its decisions and consequences.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> See “Peace With God the Creator,” ¶3: “Adam and Eve’s call to share in the unfolding of God’s plan of creation brought into play those abilities and gifts which distinguish the human being from all other creatures. At the same time, their call established a fixed relationship between mankind and the rest of creation. Made in the image and likeness of God, Adam and Eve were to have exercised their dominion over the earth...with wisdom and love.” See also “Martino Statement”: “[T]he human being [is] the only creature in this world who is not only capable of being conscious of itself and of its surroundings but is gifted with the intelligence to explore, the sagacity to utilize, and is ultimately responsible for its choices and the consequences of those choices.”

<sup>73</sup> “Statement by H.E. Archbishop Giovanni Tonucci, Apostolic Nuncio and Head of the Delegation of the Holy See” (4 February 1999) at 2. See also Pope John Paul II, “Respect for Human Rights the Secret of True Peace: Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace” (1 January 1999), available at [http://www.vatican.va/holyfather/john\\_paul\\_ii/messages/peace](http://www.vatican.va/holyfather/john_paul_ii/messages/peace): “[P]lacing human well-being at the centre of concern for the environment is actually the surest way of safeguarding creation; this in fact stimulates the responsibility of

It does nothing to help the environment and much to harm it if the unique dignity and responsibility of the human person is denied.<sup>74</sup> It is a human being with the ability to act as a responsible steward who can best approach the ecological problems that we face today: not a human being who is degraded as having no special role with respect to the rest of creation.<sup>75</sup> Thus, those who truly care about the future health of the planet must continually re-assert that this unique human dignity both demands greater respect and requires more sober responsibility. In a sad irony, environmentalists have argued in this way: “If abortion were not an option, the population would be increasing even faster.... [A]llowing women to exercise control over their reproductive lives is essential for the development of the world in a manner *which promotes human dignity* and is environmentally sound.”<sup>76</sup> True environmentalism would argue that only a full recognition of inalienable human dignity is the only way to demand from humanity the sober exercise of stewardship responsibility.

2. *Consumption patterns, and not demographic patterns, play a far more significant role in environmental degradation that many are willing to acknowledge.*<sup>77</sup> While population control in developing nations is

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the individual with regard to natural resources and their judicious use.”

<sup>74</sup> See “Protect Creation” at ¶13: “[A] correct understanding of the relationship between man and the environment will not end by absolutizing nature or by considering it more important than the human person.... [I]t is because such notions eliminate the difference of identity and worth between the human person and other living things. In the name of a supposedly egalitarian vision of the ‘dignity’ of all living creatures, such notions end up abolishing the distinctiveness and superior role of human beings.”

<sup>75</sup> See also “Martino Statement,” *op. cit.*: “The praiseworthy heightened awareness of the present generation for all components of the environment, and the consequent efforts at preserving and protecting them, rather than weakening the central position of the human being, accentuate its role and responsibilities.”

<sup>76</sup> *Amici Curiae Brief* at 13, emphasis added.

<sup>77</sup> See Judith E. Jacobsen, “Population, Consumption, and Environmental Degradation: Problems and Solutions,” *Colorado Journal of Environmental Law & Policy* 6 (1995): 255-72 at pp. 258-59: “Use of resources and production of wastes are at the heart of environmental degradation. Thus, it is inappropriate to focus exclusively on population growth as the drawing force of environmental

quickly advocated as an easy solution, disproportionate consumption in developed countries poses a far graver threat to ecological well-being.<sup>78</sup> As one observer noted, “it is inescapable that over consumption by the rich few is the key problem, rather than overpopulation of the poor many.”<sup>79</sup> The statistics on this point are staggering. As is often reported, “[t]he 20 percent of the world’s population living in the highest-income countries account for 86 percent of total private consumption, whereas the poorest 20 percent account for 1.3 percent of the same.”<sup>80</sup> Or, “[t]he world’s richest half-billion people – that’s about 7 percent of the global population – are responsible for 50 percent of the world’s carbon dioxide emissions. Meanwhile, the poorest 50 percent are responsible for just 7 percent of emissions.”<sup>81</sup> In light of this, it should not be surprising that

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degradation. If one’s focus is environmental degradation, consumption in rich countries deserves at least as much attention as population growth in poor ones.” See also Brian C. O’Neill, “Climate Change and Population Growth,” in Mazur, pp. 81-94, at 84: “[W]hile population size is a driver of greenhouse emissions, it is not necessarily the most important driver. Increases in GDP also were found to have a roughly proportional effect on emissions, and technology effects were equally important.”

<sup>78</sup> See “Peace With God the Creator,” at ¶8: “It is manifestly unjust that a privileged few should continue to accumulate excess goods, squandering available resources, while masses of people are living in conditions of misery at the very lowest level of subsistence. Today, the dramatic threat of ecological breakdown is teaching us the extent to which greed and selfishness – both individual and collective – are contrary to the order of creation, an order which is characterized by mutual interdependence.” See *ibid.*, ¶13: “Modern society will find no solution to the ecological problem unless it takes a serious look at its lifestyle. In many parts of the world, society is given to instant gratification and consumerism while remaining indifferent to the damage which these cause.”

<sup>79</sup> Fred Pearce, “Consumption Dwarfs Population as Main Environmental Threat,” *Yale e360* (2008), available at <http://e360.yale.edu/content/print.msp?id=2140>. See also *ibid.*: “[I]t strikes me as the height of hubris to downgrade the culpability of the rich world’s environmental footprint because generations of poor people not yet born might one day get to be as rich and destructive as us. Overpopulation is not driving environmental destruction at the global level; over consumption is” (*ibid.*).

<sup>80</sup> Bandarage, p. 58.

<sup>81</sup> Pearce, *op. cit.*

[D]eveloping countries point out that per capita emissions of children born in poor countries are, and are likely to remain, much lower than those in richer countries, and claim that they are being stigmatized for "profligate reproductive behavior" as a negotiating position over [such things as] greenhouse gas commitments.<sup>82</sup>

Certainly, there are many non-ecological reasons to soberly weigh the impact of unsustainable consumption patterns:

[W]hen we consider human dignity, life in community, and the common good, we must be particularly aware of the needs of the least powerful among us. How do our economic, political, and legal decisions affect those who are least able to speak for themselves and who are more often than not in the worst position to bear sacrifices that might be necessary for the common good?<sup>83</sup>

As an ecological matter, however, it is particularly important to focus first on consumption and waste. Indeed, "[b]y enhancing our efforts to promote ecological consciousness for serenity and peaceful coexistence, we can give witness to a respectful way of life that finds meaning not in having

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<sup>82</sup> Campbell-Lendrum & Lusti-Narasimhan, p. 807. See also Timothy E. Wirth, "Foreword: Population-Challenges and Alternatives," *Colorado Journal of International Environmental Law & Policy* 6 (1995): 245-47, at pp. 245-46, noting "resentment by the developing countries over the emphasis given to population growth as a cause of environmental problems in the absence of a parallel focus on resource compensation in the North." See also Jacobsen, p. 270: "[T]he average African couple would have to have more than ninety children to equal the environmental impact from commercial energy use of a corresponding American couple with two children." See also Malea Moepf Young, et al., "Adapting to Climate Change: The Role of Reproductive Health" in Mazur, pp. 108-23 at p. 109: "The average American emits 200 times more carbon each year than the average Ethiopian, yet Ethiopia is expected to experience more severe impacts, including major changes in temperature, water availability, and malaria zones in coming years, with few resources to adapt." More generally, see Pogge, p. 526: "So many deaths due to poverty related causes constitute a huge human rights problem... [S]omewhere around a quarter of the world's population is living in life-threatening poverty."

<sup>83</sup> Vincent D. Rougeau, "Catholic Social Teaching and Global Migration: Bridging the Paradox of Universal Human Rights and Territorial Self-Determination," *Seattle University Law Review* 32 (2009): 343-59, at p. 347.

more, but in being more.”<sup>84</sup>

3. *A focus on authentic and comprehensive human development is required in international aid programs and in the setting of financial priorities.*<sup>85</sup> Authentic human development has as its starting point the good of the human person and centers its attention on what is in humanity’s short- and long-term best interest. The importance of authentic development as an ideal seems to be widely recognized, even though its attainment is not always pursued with the vigor it deserves.

Indeed, despite what often seems to be its over-eager focus on population control as a solution to environmental woes, even the United Nations itself has declared that “the human person is the central subject of the development process and...development policy should therefore make the human being the main participant and beneficiary of development.”<sup>86</sup> This echoes the view of religious leaders who have argued:

Environmental issues are also linked to other basic problems.... To ensure the survival of a healthy planet, then, we must not only establish a sustainable economy but must also labor for justice both within and among

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<sup>84</sup> “Vesakh Statement,” ¶5. See also “Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to Mrs. Nafis Sadik, Secretary General of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (March 18, 1994)” in *Serving the Human Family*, ed. Carl J. Marucci (New York NY: Path to Peace Foundation, 1997), p. 195: (While population growth is often blamed for environmental problems, we know that the matter is more complex. Patterns of consumption and waste, especially in developed nations, depletion of natural resources, the absence of restrictions or safeguards in some industrial or production processes, all endanger the natural environment.”

<sup>85</sup> See “Protect Creation,” ¶5: “It should be evident that the ecological crisis cannot be viewed in isolation from other related questions, since it is closely linked to the notion of development itself and our understanding of man in his relationship to others and to the rest of creation. Prudence would thus dictate a profound, long-term review of our model of development, one which would take into consideration the meaning of the economy and its goals with an eye to correcting its malfunctions and misapplications.”

<sup>86</sup> U.N.. Declaration on the Right to Development (4 December 1986), available at <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/41/a4/r128.htm>. The United Nations has also expressed deep concern that “an estimated 1.4 billion people were still living in extreme poverty in 2005.” United Nations, “The Millennium Development Goals Report 2010,” hereinafter *2010 Millennium Report*, p. 4.

nations. We must seek a society where economic life and environmental commitment work together to protect and to enhance life on this planet.<sup>87</sup>

It can be tempting to adopt the less expensive and efficient approach of curbing population with morally questionable or even coercive techniques. Yet, authentic human development with a focus on improving education and health is, in the long term, more effective in arriving at a sustainable population without violation of inherent human dignity.<sup>88</sup>

With respect to education, for example, “[i]mproving educational attainment, particularly of girls, would also have an impact on population dynamics, since education is known to influence demographic behavior

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<sup>87</sup> USCCB, “Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on the Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching” (14 November 1991), available at <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/ejp/bishopsstatement.shtml>, hereinafter “Renewing the Earth.” See also “The Heart of Peace,” ¶9: “[R]espect for nature is closely linked to the need to establish, between individuals and between nations, relationships that are attentive to the dignity of the human person and capable of satisfying his or her authentic needs. The destruction of the environment, its improper or selfish use, and the violent hoarding of the earth’s resources causes grievances, conflicts and wars, precisely because they are the consequences of an inhumane concept of development.”

<sup>88</sup> See Pogge, p. 532: “[T]here is a very high correlation between poverty and total fertility rates.” See also “Renewing the Earth, p. 89: “Respect for nature ought to encourage policies that promote natural family planning and true responsible parenthood rather than coercive population control programs.... How...can we protect endangered species and at the same time be callous to the unborn, the elderly, or disabled persons? Is not abortion also a sin against creation? If we turn our backs on our own unborn children, can we truly expect that nature will receive respectful treatment at our hands? The care of the earth will not be advanced by the destruction of human life....”

See also USCCB, “Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good” (15 June 2001), available at <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/globalclimate.shtml>: “Population is not simply about statistics. Behind every demographic number is a precious and irreplaceable human life whose dignity must be respected. The global climate change cannot become just another opportunity for some groups – usually affluent advocates from the developed nations – to blame the problem on population growth in poor countries.”

with respect to nuptuality, fertility, health, and migration.”<sup>89</sup> With respect to health care, “[p]roblems, such as poor health care facilities in the Third World, encourage women to have many children because they know that they will lose numerous children.... Therefore, it becomes problematic to tell a woman to stop having children.”<sup>90</sup>

Obviously, there are many other reasons to favor both improved educational access and more effective health care for the world’s poorest people. However, from an ecological perspective, these initiatives also have a natural impact on population and resource use<sup>91</sup> without raising the complex moral questions of population control regimes. Unfortunately, these important goals must constantly compete with spending on

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<sup>89</sup> “Population Challenges,” p. 43. See also “Population Report,” p. 50: “The most urgent objective is certainly that of education. Education should not, however, be limited to the diffusion of knowledge but must give rise to the sense of responsibility on the part of persons.” See also “2010 Millennium Report,” p. 5: “In developing regions overall, girls in the poorest 20 percent of households are 3.5 times more likely to be out of school than girls in the richest households and four times more likely to be out of school than boys from the richest households.”

<sup>90</sup> Saleem, p. 25. See also “UN Population Division Policy Brief March 2009” at p. 4, hereinafter “March 2009 Population Brief,” available at [http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/UNPD\\_policybriefs/UNPD\\_policy\\_brief1.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/UNPD_policybriefs/UNPD_policy_brief1.pdf): “Fertility reductions are more likely to occur and be sustained when child mortality is declining because the lower child mortality, the more certain parents can be that their offspring will survive to adulthood, thus reducing the need to have more children than desired as a insurance against premature death.” “Population Report,” p. 69: “[P]rovision of clean water, sanitation, vaccination and other health care is essential not only for humanitarian reasons, but is also likely to slow down rather than accelerate the population increase.” See also Pogge, p. 533: “The main reason for high fertility rates among the poor is simply that people do not know whether they will have surviving offspring, given the great poverty in which they live. Surviving offspring are their only security for old age; who else will take care of them if they even become unable to work?”

<sup>91</sup> See LeRoy, pp. 324-25: “More than any hydrologist or urban planner, it is women in the developing world – the drawers, carriers, and household managers of water – who understand what water security is and what its implications are for families and communities. And women everywhere need to be empowered to translate their knowledge and their energies into action. Real opportunities for women, in education, economic and political life, and family decision-making, could vastly improve both the management of natural resources such as water as well as women’s own health, status, and well-being.”

population control.<sup>92</sup>

Similarly, authentic development also requires that more and better attention be paid to assisting the poor of the world in developing sustainable cities and urban communities. Such urban centers hold both peril and promise for long-term ecological well-being, as well as for the social, moral, and physical health of those who dwell there. As commentators have observed, “[i]f recent trends continue as projected to 2050, virtually all of the world’s population growth will be in urban areas,”<sup>93</sup> and “[i]n 2008, the world reached an invisible but momentous milestone: For the first time in history, more than half its human population, 3.3 billion people, lived in urban areas.”<sup>94</sup> An easy approach is to simply focus on the reduction of human population in urban areas. But, this ignores the promise of urban sustainability which may be enhanced, even if not achieved, by a greater focus on authentic development.<sup>95</sup>

4. *People of good will must consider the ways in which the sciences – both technical and social – may be put to far better use in addressing ecological problems.* In our era, those who are truly concerned with advancing a pro-life environmental movement must also focus on

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<sup>92</sup> See Msgr. Frank J. Dewane, “Interventio della Delegazione della Santa Sede al Forum Internazionale dell’ Aia sulla popolazione e lo sviluppo,” (10 February 1999), available at [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/secretariat-state/documents/rc-seg-st\\_doc\\_1102\\_1999-](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/secretariat-state/documents/rc-seg-st_doc_1102_1999-): “[T]he disproportion between the funds allocated for reproductive health and those allocated for the elimination of widespread endemic diseases or for education is noted.” But see “2010 Millennium Report”: “[F]inancial resources for family planning services and supplies have not kept pace with demand. Aid for family planning as a proportion of total aid to health declined sharply between 2000 and 2008, from 8.2 percent to 3.2 percent. Aid to reproductive health services has fluctuated between 8.1 percent and 8.5 percent. External funding for family planning in constant 2008 US dollars actually declined during the first few years of this decade and has not yet returned to its 2000 level.”

<sup>93</sup> Cohen, p. 33.

<sup>94</sup> U.N. Population Fund, “The Urban Millennium” in Mazur, pp. 66-77, at p. 66, hereinafter “*Urban Millennium*.”

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.* at p. 67: “Cities embody the environmental damage done by modern civilization, yet experts and policymakers increasingly recognize the potential value of cities to long-term sustainability. If cities create environmental problems, they also contain the solutions.”

advancement in both scientific and social sciences so that the promise of human knowledge and advancement can be channeled toward protecting both humanity and the environment in which it finds itself.

With respect to the technical sciences, there is a growing variety of options available that may offer alternatives to fuels or increase the food supply available from previously untapped sources.<sup>96</sup> While no one should be naive enough to say that technology will provide a solution to all the planet's ecological woes, a pro-life perspective should encourage ingenuity, generosity, creativity, optimism, and patience in creating and sharing solutions to ecological threats and limitations on natural resources. This is particularly true when it is the lack of basic technology that itself causes ecological degradation.<sup>97</sup>

The short and long term needs of many with respect to agricultural development, access to clean water, eradication of infectious diseases, and fights against destructive infestations, to name but a few, require investment and devotion. Even the reallocation of a small fraction of the investment in population control towards developing greater technological assistance could have an important ecological benefit.

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<sup>96</sup> See Bader: "Environmental problems are not the result of population growth so much as they are the result of unsustainable consumption of resources by humans. As better technology is developed, resources can be used more efficiently and the earth can sustain a larger population.... The Earth can support an increase in population, as long as consumption is reduced to the level sustainable by current technology."

<sup>97</sup> See Jacobsen, p. 267: "It seems paradoxical that environmental damage could flow from dearth. But in fact environmental damage stems directly from poverty, the options that poverty excludes, and the low productivity that flows from it." See also Lynne Gaffikin, "Population Growth, Ecosystem Services and Human Well Being," in Mazur, pp. 124-35, at p. 127: "Where poor farmers lack the means or the incentive...to conserve soil and manage crops effectively, the result can be a downward spiral of poverty and land degradation." See also Pogge, p. 531: "Although very poor people do less ecological harm per person than the affluent, they do more ecological harm per unit of income. This is primarily because poor people cannot take care to consume in an ecologically sustainable manner. They often have to use up the last available firewood because they need it for survival. And they must consume essentially all of their income. They cannot afford to save.... [A]s poverty is eradicated, as people become more able to save, more able to show concern for the environment, their ecological footprint per unit of income will decrease."

In addition, of course, to technology, a scientific approach to the social sciences, particularly economics and politics, should be applied to study the true reasons for the shortages in resources and the abundance of environmental woes that exist today.<sup>98</sup> As has been observed,

Many of these [developing] countries have considerable natural resources which would often be able to sustain populations larger than the ones they currently have. Unfortunately, too often this potential is either not sufficiently exploited or badly exploited. More often than not, the Earth possesses materials which, thanks to man's inventiveness, have been shown throughout history to be decisive resources for human progress. In the first place, the source of the difficulties of so-called Third World countries is to be sought in international relations.<sup>99</sup>

Unfortunately,

[w]hat really needs to be addressed in the population-environment dynamic is the practical effect that government policies and civil wars have on population and the environment. This effect is especially important when reviewing food shortages in certain parts of the world that are not a result of too many people, or too little food or resources, but a result of infrastructure problems.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> See Slifer, p. 155: “[W]hat really needs to be addressed in the population – environment dynamic is the practical effect that government politics and civil wars have on population and the environment. This effect is especially important when reviewing food shortages in certain parts of the world that are not a result of too many people or too little food or resources, but a result of infrastructure problems.” See also “Protect Creation,” ¶7: “[T]he current pace of environmental exploitation is seriously endangering the supply of certain natural resources not only for the present generation, but above all for the generations yet to come.... [E]nvironmental degradation is often due to the lack of far-sighted official policies or to the pursuit of myopic economic interests, which then, tragically, become a serious threat to creation.”

<sup>99</sup> “Ethical and Pastoral Dimensions of Population Trends,” *op. cit.*

<sup>100</sup> Slifer, p. 155. See also “Peace With God the Creator,” ¶11: “Rural poverty and unjust land distribution in many countries, for example, have led to subsistence farming and to the exhaustion of the soil. Once their land yields no more, many farmers move on to clear new land, thus accelerating uncontrolled deforestation, or they settle in urban centers which lack the infrastructure to receive them.”

While certainly some of the reasons for a shortage of necessary resources is easily attributed to nature itself, the misallocation and faulty distribution of those resources also plays an important and man-made part. Thus, there is a role here for the generous expertise of social scientists, economists, political scientists, and diplomats as well.

5. *Intergenerational solidarity must be at the center of a pro-life environmental movement.* Finally, more and more is being written about the notion of intergenerational solidarity – an important concept that requires that all decisions made today consider the future of generations yet to be born.<sup>101</sup> This is a sound approach from both an ecological and

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<sup>101</sup> See Antholis & Talbott, p. 24: “Our concept of intergenerational equity holds that assets do not belong exclusively to those who have accrued them; rather, those resources should, to the extent possible, be administered and preserved for those who will inherit them and will, partly as a consequence of their inheritance, live somewhat better lives than those who came before. We come into this world indebted to our ancestors, and we leave it an incrementally better place, believing our descendants will come up with means of fending off or coping with whatever their age throws at them.” Antholis and Talbott refer to far more famous proponents of “intergenerational equity.” Edmund Burke wrote of the “partnership... between those who are living, those who are dead and those who are to be born” (ibid.), while Thomas Jefferson said “the earth belongs in usufruct [trust] to the living.... [N]o generation can contract debts greater than may be paid during the course of its own existence” (ibid).

See also “Peace With God the Creator,” ¶6: “[W]e cannot interfere in one area of the ecosystem without paying due attention both to the consequences of such interference in other areas and to the well-being of further generations.” See also “Protect Creation,” ¶2: “The environment must be seen as God’s gift to all people, and the use we make of it entails a shared responsibility for all humanity, especially the poor and future generations” and ¶8: “A greater sense of intergenerational solidarity is urgently needed. Future generations cannot be saddled with the cost of our use of common environmental resources.”

John F. Haught, *The Promise of Nature: Ecology and Cosmic Purpose* (New York NY: Paulist Press, 1993), p. 128: “Ecological ethicists today agree that we need a new sense of intergenerational responsibility.” See also W. Wade Berryhill, “Liberation and Property: Virtues and Values Toward a Theocentric Earth Ethics,” *Regent University Law Review* 16 (2003-2004): 1-52: “We owe a duty to future generations to allow them to inherit a healthy environment. Essential to this obligation is spiritual faith, not the trendy brand of secular humanism espoused by eco-dogmatists seeking environmental justice through means unmoored from centuries-old principles of creation.” See also ibid., p. 8: “Principles of stewardship and trusteeship further dictate that each generation

humanitarian perspective.<sup>102</sup> At times, the rhetoric about intergenerational solidarity is truly inspiring – calling us to consider the rights of generations to come. By reflecting on the rights of future generations, the interests of the unborn are best put into perspective.

Nearly forty years ago, in preparation for the landmark United Nations Environmental Conference in Stockholm, Pope Paul VI warned, “our generation must energetically accept the challenge of going beyond partial and immediate aims to prepare a hospitable earth for future generations.”<sup>103</sup> This is not a challenge that is without sacrifice. Rather, “[i]t is necessary to think a great deal of the future generations, to pay the price of austerity in order not to weaken or reduce – or worse still, to make unbearable – the living conditions of future generations. Justice and humanity require this too.”<sup>104</sup> Yet, this beautiful demand – to prepare for future generations with hope and love – lies in stark contrast to the fear of the future that drives much population control rhetoric.<sup>105</sup>

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should take into account the interests of future generations.” See also “Renewing the Earth” ¶7: “[G]enerations yet unborn will bear the cost for our failure to act today.”

<sup>102</sup> See Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *“In the Beginning”*: A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall, trans. Boniface Ramsey (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1986): “Past, present, and future must encounter and penetrate one another in every human life. Our age is the first to experience that hideous narcissism that cuts itself off from both past and future and that is preoccupied exclusively with its own present” (p. 34).

<sup>103</sup> Pope Paul VI, “Message of Pope Paul VI to the Stockholm Conference” (1 June 1972), available at [http://conservation.catholic.org/pope\\_paul\\_vi.htm](http://conservation.catholic.org/pope_paul_vi.htm).

<sup>104</sup> Pope John Paul II, “Address to Farmers and Workers.” See also Avery Cardinal Dulles, “Catholic Social Teaching and American Legal Practice,” 30 *Fordham Urban Law Journal* (2002): 277-89, at p. 281: “In recent years it has become alarmingly evident that human beings have the capacity to ravage the earth...and to mutilate the beauty of God’s creation. It is urgent for us to become more conscious that the resources of creation are given to us in trust, to be preserved for the use and enjoyment of all peoples, including future generations.”

<sup>105</sup> Pope Benedict recently posed this challenge to the youth of the world: “The future of the planet is entrusted to the new generations, in which there are evident signs of a development that has not always been able to protect the delicate balances of nature. Before it is too late, it is necessary to make courageous decisions that can recreate a strong alliance between humankind and the earth.”

## CONCLUSION

We are at a critically important juncture in the ability of the pro-life movement to speak a prophetic word to the ecological movement.<sup>106</sup> Many religious groups are addressing ecological issues, and they bring with them a strong foundation in respect for life.<sup>107</sup> At the heart of this involvement is the realization that:

The web of life is one. Our mistreatment of the natural world diminishes our own dignity and sacredness, not only because we are destroying resources that future generations of humans need, but because we are engaging in actions that contradict what it means to be human. Our tradition calls us to protect the life and dignity of the human person, and it is increasingly clear that this task cannot be separated from the care and defense of all of creation.<sup>108</sup>

This new participation of religious groups in the largely secular environmental world is a welcome sign as “a new ecological awareness is beginning to emerge.”<sup>109</sup> In my own Catholic faith, Pope Benedict XVI

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Pope Benedict XVI, “Homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI, Plain of Montorso” (2 September 2007), available at [http://www.vatican.va/holy-father/benedict\\_xvi/homilies/2007/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20070902\\_loreto-en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy-father/benedict_xvi/homilies/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20070902_loreto-en.html).

<sup>106</sup> I am not alone in observing the unique position in which we find ourselves today. As Pope Benedict recently observed in “Protect Creation” at ¶9: “The ecological crisis offers an historic opportunity to develop a common plan of action aimed at orienting the model of global development towards greater respect for creation and for an integral human development inspired by the values proper to charity in truth. I would advocate the adoption of a model of development based on the centrality of the human person, on the promotion and sharing of the common good, on responsibility, on a realization of our need for a changed lifestyle, and on prudence, the virtue which tells us what needs to be done today in view of what might happen tomorrow.”

<sup>107</sup> I have explored the intersection of Catholic social thought and ecology in some prior work. See “Environmental Ethics from the Perspectives of NEPA and Catholic Social Teaching: Ecological Guidance for the 21st Century,” *William & Mary Environmental Law & Policy Review* 28 (2004): 659-798, also available electronically at <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1559091>.

<sup>108</sup> “Renewing the Earth.”

<sup>109</sup> “Peace With God the Creator” ¶1.

often wrote powerfully and passionately about the need for a morally cohesive ecological vision that “is pro-life, pro-family, pro-poor, and pro-peace. We are to receive one another as gifts. We must never use human persons as objects. We should receive creation as a gift, to be shared with one another, and not as an object of use.”<sup>110</sup>

Whether this will lead to a truly pro-life approach to the environmental movement is not yet clear. But it gives me reason to hope and also makes me more aware of the urgency with which we must act.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Keith Fournier, *What Did the Pope Say About the Environment?*, Dec. 17, 2009 (available at Catholic Online, <http://www.catholic.org/> printerfriendly.php?id=35044 & section=Cathcom).

<sup>111</sup> I am deeply grateful to the organizers of the June 2010 University Faculty for Life Annual Conference for gathering together many scholars from different faiths and academic disciplines to reflect seriously, positively, and faithfully on the culture of life and the threats to it that come from various sectors of society. I am also thankful to Emily Black of the Catholic University Law Library for her research assistance.