

# Under the Sign of Saint Francis: Catholics, Ethics of Responsibility, and Environmental Education

Mario Salomone, University of Bergamo, Italy

## **Abstract**

*Catholics increasingly appear to agree with the most passionate defenders of the environment. The ecological problem for Catholics is essentially moral: it comes down to respecting the value of life and the beauty of the cosmos, practicing meekness, and controlling one's desire for dominion. This point was stressed a great deal by John Paul II, who urged for an "ecological conversion" and denounced the "anthropological error" of an arbitrary use of the earth. The human responsibility also translates into educational recommendations and concrete practices: given that modern society will find no solution to the ecological problem unless it takes a serious look at lifestyle, an education in ecological responsibility becomes essential and entails a genuine conversion in thought and behaviour.*

## **Résumé**

*Les catholiques sont de plus en plus engagés dans la sauvegarde de l'environnement. Selon l'Église catholique le problème écologique est surtout moral : il s'agit de respecter la vie sur la terre et la beauté de l'univers grâce à la sobriété et au renoncement à la maîtrise du monde. Ce thème a été bien souligné par Jean Paul II, qui a proposé une « conversion écologique » et qui a dénoncé l'erreur anthropologique qui aboutit à un mauvais usage de la planète. La responsabilité humaine se traduit en recommandations éducatives et en bonnes pratiques : la société contemporaine ne pourra pas résoudre les problèmes de l'environnement si/ni ne changera pas son style de vie. Le principe de responsabilité est essentiel et requiert une vraie conversion du mode de penser et du mode de vie.*

**Keywords:** Catholicism; creation; eco-theology; lifestyles; responsibility; environmental education

A famous article by Lynn White Jr. (1967), eminent historian of the Middle Ages and of technology, accused Christianity of being the most anthropocentric religion that has ever existed. Investigating the origins of the ecological crisis of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, White claimed the exploitation of nature was favoured by the destruction of pagan animism, but especially by having inspired the dynamism of modern western science. White suggested instead a return to the alternative view of Saint Francis, and launched an idea: "I propose Francis as a patron saint for ecologists" (1967, p. 1207). Pope John Paul II granted the proposal with the apostolic bull of 29 November 1979,

proclaiming the most radical saint of the Middle Ages “heavenly Patron of those who promote ecology.” In reality, the suggestion had already reached him earlier, above all by members of the Planning Environmental and Ecological Institute for Quality Life.

Apart from White’s recommendation, calling Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) the patron saint of ecologists is the symbolic confirmation of a sensitivity that in those years was gaining strength among all of the Christian faiths, Catholic included. The choice falls on Saint Francis because of his sense of universal fraternity with all creatures, including inanimate ones like the sun, the moon, water, the wind, fire, and the earth—creatures he respectively called “brothers” and “sisters” and which he always surrounded with delicate respect and tenderness. Moreover, Saint Francis was perhaps the first Christian to call the earth “mother.”

We can find episodes in the life of the Italian saint in which Francis talks to the animals; his *Canticle of Creatures* is a message of reconciliation with all creation. But Francis is also a saint who devotes himself to the illiterate, the poor, lepers, social outcasts, and bandits—all those “lessers” (“minors”) on the fringes of the medieval city ruled by the “greater,” which was the social class to which he belonged and from which he chose to make a break. Harmony with the creation and a sense of justice towards the powerless and the less well-off, which includes most of humankind, are an intricate part of Franciscan spirituality, and they underline the still highly relevant bond that exists between the environment and society. Human beings continue to usurp nature and the well-being and happiness of their own kind.

### The Turning Point in the 1970s

We must admit that at the time White wrote his denunciation of the anthropocentrism of western Christianity (albeit simplified and one-sided), the situation did seem to prove him right, at least in part. In the sphere of Catholicism, the great Second Vatican Council urges a pursuit of “being” more than “having,” but it also praises development:

Today more than ever before attention is rightly given to the increase of the production of agricultural and industrial goods and of the rendering of services, for the purpose of making provision for the growth of population and of satisfying the increasing desires of the human race. Therefore, technical progress, an inventive spirit, an eagerness to create and to expand enterprises, the application of methods of production, and the strenuous efforts of all who engage in production—in a word, all the elements making for such development—must be promoted. (*Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes*, 1965, ¶ 64)

The boundaries of economic activity, states the conciliar document, lie in the moral order and in the need for justice and equity. Nature is still viewed as a depository of resources at humankind’s disposal, save the ethical obli-

gation to distribute them fairly. At the time, the Catholic Church was mainly concerned about world hunger, serious socioeconomic inequities, wars, and arms expenditures—topics to which the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes* devotes considerable attention.

The cry of Rachel Carson had not, as yet, really arrived under the vaults of Saint Peter's Basilica. Various authors, including Christian theologians, agree that the Judaic-Christian tradition has serious responsibilities in terms of ecology, and they also admit that this tradition conserves "an unequivocal idea of anthropocentrism" (Conigliaro, 2005, p. 58).

So, beginning in the 1970s, monotheistic religions become aware of the ecological crisis and started a number of environmental initiatives in response to the radically changed theological thought. The debate was undoubtedly stimulated by White's article, which "had significant influence on the nature and number of subsequent publications" (Sheldon, 1992, p. 4). Nevertheless, the cause of the debate was not to be attributed to him alone, just as it would be incorrect to hold religions responsible for a destruction of the planet that began with the appearance of *homo sapiens sapiens*. Consequently, the sails and the cannons of European powers and the industrial revolution are much more responsible. Moreover, we should remember that as early as the 1950s and 1960s, there were many texts written about ecology from the Christian perspective (in addition to those written by Christian authors of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and first decades of the 1900s) (Morandini, 2005; Nash, 1989; Sheldon, 1992).

Between 1964 and 1974, with various interventions by Pope Paul VI (1963-1978), Catholics were showing an increasing interest in ecology. Paul VI was the first pope with whom the Church began to take a stand on ecology, that is if one excludes a declaration in defence of animals made by Pope Pius XII (1939-1958). This growing attention took on new and greater meaning after 1986, in part because of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster and other environmental catastrophes (Keenan, 2002; Simula, 2001).

I shall not go over the phases of this transformation here, which had its usual precursors and witnessed an important contribution from highly critical voices around the world (e.g., from liberation theology in Latin American, and native American, African, and Asian theologians) (Morandini, 2005). Rather, I shall dwell upon the positive contribution that the Church has made in recent decades and can continue to make in the future.

In spite of an increasingly hedonistic and consumeristic society, churches continue to hold great sway in terms of education. The Catholic Church certainly has great moral and cultural influence because of its prestige, its numbers (there are more than one billion Catholics), and the enormous organizational strength of its parishes, religious orders, universities and schools, publishing houses, mass media, and facilities and associations for all ages and all social sectors. The liturgy itself can be an excellent environmental education tool for the faithful (Terrin, 2003).

Educational responsibility effectively translates into offices and work groups for the “protection of the Creation” and the “pastoral of the Creation,” or, rather, social affairs facilities devoted to the social commitment of the Church. Remembering that the Catholic Church can make a very significant contribution to environmental education precisely because it has the necessary means, I shall try to examine the world of Catholicism by way of some of the basic principles of environmental education (e.g., Salomone, 2005a, 2005b; Sauvé, 2000; WEEC, 2005). In other words, I shall analyze the official positions that the Catholic Church and Catholic theologians have about:

- the relations that are the focus of environmental education (relations between humankind and nature, in nature, in time scales, and between human beings);
- the ethical foundations of environmental education (ethics of the value of life on Earth, of global responsibility for solidarity, of recognizing otherness and differences, and of participative democracy—all of which promote pluralism and place value on the rights of minorities). Considering that overcoming limits is at the basis of western thought, an essential point here is having a sense of limits. I suggest we must therefore separate the spirit of this research and improvement from the spirit of conquest and dominion;
- the educational commitment that follows from it, the favoured topics, and the attention given to changing lifestyles.

Finally, there can be no environmental education without an ethical view and complex thinking, as well as a dedication to real change. It remains to be seen just how active the world of Catholicism is in terms of environmental education (and not merely with words but with facts) and in rebuilding that sense of limits I have mentioned. Arising from ethics, this is one of the greatest challenges of education. As it would be impossible here to pursue all the nuances of biblical exegesis and consider all the subtleties of theological debate, I shall confine the discussion to the most recent documents and to what I feel are the most interesting points.

## An Interconnected World

Regarding the first point, Catholic thought (like that of other Christian churches) follows two guiding principles: the interpretation of the Bible and the dogmas. In the case of the Catholic Church, great importance is given to *doctrine*, or the body of principles and norms with which the Church intervenes on specific issues, and *magisterium* (teachings), or rather the authentic interpretation of the word of God, which is the competence of the College of Bishops presided over by the Pope, who has absolute supremacy in the

Catholic Church. Here I shall make reference to Pope John Paul II in particular, both because of the exceptional length of his papacy (1978-2005) and the great attention he paid to the themes of ecology.

A rereading of the Bible must obviously start with Genesis. The first chapters of the sacred text are no longer interpreted in terms of historic or scientific hermeneutics, but rather in a poetic and symbolic way. As early as the Second Vatican Council it was stated that:

To search out the intention of the sacred writers, attention should be given, among other things, to “literary forms.” For truth is set forth and expressed differently in texts, which are variously historical, prophetic, poetic, or of other forms of discourse. (*Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation Dei Verbum*, 1965, ¶ 12)

Symbolism is an extraordinarily effective way to communicate knowledge (Greco & Muratore, 1998). Given the symbolism and the new ecological awareness, some fresh ideas emerge from the story of the creation. Between the first and the sixth day, God created light; divided the earth from the heavens, people from plants, and flowers and fruit; created the Sun, the Moon, and the stars; populated the waters and the skies with creatures that swim and fly; and filled the earth with animals of all kinds. Each time He was gratified with His work: “God saw how good it was” (1 Genesis 1:25).<sup>1</sup> On the sixth day, God said: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. Let him have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and the cattle, and over all the wild animals and all the creatures that crawl on the ground” (1 Genesis 26).<sup>2</sup> Having created man (*Adam*, from Hebrew *adamah*, the earth), “God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good” and finally, on the seventh day, he rested. So commences the events narrated by the Old Testament and the question of “dominion” over all creatures.

André Wénin, professor of Holy Scripture at the Catholic University of Louvain-La Neuve (Terrin, 2003), observes that the expression “God saw how good it was” is not found in the biblical text after the creation of human beings, but comes later, in reference to “everything he had made.” Humankind is an unfinished work which, being made “in God’s image,” must try to “resemble” Him. Wénin interprets “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” as a call to humans, not God summoning Himself. But which image of God should humans resemble? That image of God that does not cause destruction, or make any denial in creating the world? Even the elements of the initial chaos—the darkness and the abyss of the waters—are part of the creative word of God. Creation is a “community of co-creatures” bound by solidarity and the sharing of vital space (Bianchi, 2003).

The interpretation of the Trinitarian dogma and a reading of the New Testament confirm this. The creation was the work of the sovereign freedom of God (the Father). He made it an expression of His poetic intelligence (the Logos-Son) and accompanied it with His love (the Spirit) until it was finally fulfilled in a promise of reconciliation and peace that concerned not only

humans, but the entire cosmos (Bianchi, 2003; Brena, 2005; Golser, 2005; Morandini, 2005; Terrin, 2003).

The incarnation places creation in an evolutionary and historical perspective “attuned to the general orientation of current science” (Brena, 2003, p. 67). The Trinity is thus an image of complexity. God himself is one and triune, plurality in unity, just like the creation which must be loved in all of its various manifestations (Messina, 2005).

Rejecting the Cartesian distinction between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, emphasis is placed on the corporality of humans, on their “male” and “female” animalism (like other animals), and on their natural being in nature. This obviously does not mean the Catholic Church embraces biocentrism or ecocentrism; indeed, human beings are the only living things capable of thinking about their own relationship with other living beings.

In any case, the complexity, the *autopoiesi*, the very theory of Gaia, easily find their place in a vision of a world made of relationships and networks—networks in nature and among human beings, which are based on principles of co-evolution, solidarity, and global responsibility:

Theology, philosophy and science all speak of a harmonious universe, of a “cosmos” endowed with its own integrity, its own internal, dynamic balance. *This order must be respected*. The human race is called to explore this order, to examine it with due care and to make use of it while safeguarding its integrity. (John Paul II, 1989, ¶ 8)

Proving to be an astute observer of the state of the world and the scientific achievements regarding the interconnection among all phenomena, John Paul II (and the Catholic Church with him) knew full well that “we cannot interfere in one area of the ecosystem without paying due attention to the consequences of such interference in other areas as well as the well-being of future generations” (1989, ¶ 6). And he called on everyone to become responsible:

While in some cases the damage already done may well be irreversible, in many other cases it can still be halted. It is necessary, however, that the entire human community—individuals, States and international bodies—take seriously the responsibility that is theirs. (John Paul II, 1989, ¶ 6)

## Sense of Limits and Ethics of Responsibility

I have therefore come to another point considered the litmus paper of the Catholics’ “ecological correctness”: ethical inspiration and the value given to the sense of limits.

I shall take my cue from biblical exegesis in this case, as well. There is no question that in the Bible, great emphasis is placed on humankind’s “dominion” over other creatures. Yet if we analyze, (object the “ecologist”

theologians), the verb *radah* (“to dominate”) in the Hebraic text, we see that it can mean “to pasture” or “to govern” (in a political sense), but never “to submit.” Humans must “cultivate and care” for the Garden of Eden (2 Genesis 15), not take it over and exploit it. God Himself taught that one needs to put a limit on one’s dominion. Indeed, as we know: “Since on the seventh day God was finished with the work he had been doing, he rested on the seventh day from all the work he had undertaken. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work he had done in creation” (2 Genesis 2:3).

Knowing how to stop, how to rest: this is the resemblance with God that humans should learn, and maybe going so far as to adopt a vegetarian diet, since God gave as food “every seed-bearing plant all over the earth and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit on it” (*Genesis*, 1, 29). Even the prohibition of taking from “the tree of knowledge of good and bad” (“From that tree you shall not eat; the moment you eat from it you are surely doomed to die,” 2 Genesis 17) should be read as an invitation to recognize limits and control cupidity.

The ecological problem for Catholics, then, is essentially a moral one. It is a question of respecting the value of life and the beauty of the cosmos, practicing meekness, and controlling one’s desire for dominion. This point was stressed a great deal by John Paul II who, in his long pontificate, repeatedly and with great energy advocated what he called an “ecological conversion” (2001). Many times in his messages, his homilies, and his encyclicals, the Pope denounces the ecological upheaval and declared that he shared the suffering of the earth:

...we immediately see that humanity has disappointed God’s expectations. Man, especially in our time, has without hesitation devastated wooded plains and valleys, polluted waters, disfigured the earth’s habitat, made the air unbreathable, disturbed the hydrogeological and atmospheric systems, turned luxuriant areas into deserts and undertaken forms of unrestrained industrialization (...). Man is no longer the Creator’s “steward,” but an autonomous despot... (John Paul II, 2001, ¶ 3-4)

The topic had also come up a few years prior to the encyclical *Evangelium vitae* (1995):

It is the ecological question—ranging from the preservation of the natural habitats of the different species of animals and of other forms of life to “human ecology” properly speaking—which finds in the Bible clear and strong ethical direction, leading to a solution which respects the great good of life, of every life. (John Paul II, 1995, ¶ 42)

In another encyclical, the Pope spoke of “an anthropological error”: “Man thinks that he can make arbitrary use of the earth, subjecting it without restraint to his will” (John Paul II, 1991, ¶ 37). Therefore, not only can

humans not presume to have dominion over the nature that even God would not have acknowledged, but must accept the legitimate *autonomy* of nature and conserve its *integrity*. Humankind is not the master of the world but, by virtue of the intelligence that distinguishes humans from other creatures, can only be its wise administrator. And “stewardship” is precisely the term that Christians repeatedly use to indicate this relationship with the world.

Perhaps one of the most all-encompassing and best articulated messages by John Paul II was given on 8 December 1989, on the occasion of the World Day of Peace:

When man turns his back on the Creator’s plan, he provokes a disorder which has inevitable repercussions on the rest of the created order. If man is not at peace with God, then earth itself cannot be at peace: “Therefore the land mourns and all who dwell in it languish, and also the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and even the fish of the sea are taken away” (Hosea 4:3). (John Paul II, 1989, ¶ 5)

Here John Paul II even seems to distance himself from the controversial notion of “sustainable development” when he observes that “clearly, an adequate solution cannot be found merely in a better management or a more rational use of the earth’s resources, as important as these may be” (1989, ¶ 5).

As for the other values that form the ethics of environmental education, things like solidarity, civil and peaceful coexistence among different populations, or the need for social justice, there is no doubt, as I have shown, that the Church preaches against poverty, wars, and injustices. The Church also denounces materialism and consumerism, and an economy enslaved to profit alone, and its members are often in the forefront in the struggle for civil rights. In recent years, the bond existing between fair relations among peoples, and a balance in the relation between humans and the nature they are a part of, has been one of the emergent themes of environmental education.

### Educational Responsibility for Change

So now I have arrived at the final point of this brief overview of the Catholic stance on ecology and its implications for education. Responsibility also translates into recommendations for education, and into concrete practice. The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, for example, views all of this as precise suggestions for Catholics. Moreover, an entire chapter based primarily on quotations by John Paul II (whose thought can be considered a useful summary) is devoted to environmental protection (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004, II, 10).

In addition to the aforementioned moral crisis, an economic system based on maximizing profits and lifestyles is also to blame. In the face of the ecological crisis, John Paul II (1989) called on governments and international



institutions to take legislative action, to cooperate, to become part of a new solidarity, and to fight against the structural forms of poverty. He urges individuals (believers and non-believers) to lead a simple existence, to be self-disciplined, and to have a spirit of sacrifice. Given that modern society will only find the solution to the ecological problem if it seriously re-examines its own lifestyle, education becomes an absolute necessity. But it must be an education in which everyone—church and religious orders, governments and families, all components of society—play their part:

*An education in ecological responsibility is urgent: responsibility for oneself, for others, and for the earth. This education cannot be rooted in mere sentiment or empty wishes. Its purpose cannot be ideological or political. It must not be based on a rejection of the modern world or a vague desire to return to some “paradise lost.” Instead, a true education in responsibility entails a genuine conversion in ways of thought and behaviour. (John Paul II, 1989, ¶ 13)*

Education, lifestyle, and overcoming the epistemology of dominion are also the cornerstones of a common declaration by John Paul II and Bartholomew I, the Ecumenic Patriarch of Constantinople:

... Christians and all other believers have a specific role to play in proclaiming moral values and in educating people in *ecological awareness*, which is none other than responsibility towards self, towards others, towards creation ....  
First, we must regain humility and recognize the limits of our powers, and most importantly, the limits of our knowledge and judgement. (*Common Declaration*, 2002, ¶ 6-8)

## Topics and Examples of Catholic Environmental Education

Now I shall examine some of the topics that are distinctive to Catholic education, whose primary aim was assigned during the papacy of John Paul II when he called it an “ecological conversion” that touch the depths of personal and collective behaviours. In Catholic environmental education, we can thus identify several “educations”:

### *Educating Desire*

In the Catholic view, greed for material goods leads the soul to perdition and ecosystems to destruction. A theme that, perhaps more than any other, characterizes the responsibility of Catholics for the environment is, in fact, that of simplicity of lifestyle. But the Church is also aware of the relationship that lifestyles have to the economic system. For this reason, it must teach a sense of responsibility to producers and people working in the mass media, on the one hand, but there is also need for an “education of consumers in the responsible use of their power of choice” (John Paul II, 1991, ¶ 36). Personal lifestyles have a vast economic significance. They can motivate or deter

behaviours that are favourable or adverse to the environment, thereby helping to determine market directions.

There are many concrete examples. Catholics are in the forefront in “collective purchase” networks (organized groups for the collective acquisition of products that are organic, ethical, etc.); in “fair trade” commerce of products from developing countries; in networks of families committed to monitoring their own consumption and containing it; in promoting local eco-development projects, cooperatives, and initiatives that tie social intervention to environmental protection; and in supporting ethical banks and investment funds.

### *Educating for Eco-Efficiency*

If the preceding point involves an *ethics of sufficiency*, the capacity to limit the consumption of nature is its corollary. In the Decalogues of behaviours disseminated by various episcopal conferences and many dioceses, we find a good deal of attention is given to the climate, energy conservation, and to limiting consumption in general. It not only involves individuals and families, but also the commitment of politicians and the social and environmental responsibility of corporations, who are urged to adopt environmental management systems and justify their efforts when making reports and profit and loss accounts.

### *Educating for the Common Good, for Participation, for Civil Coexistence*

This involves overcoming short-sighted, self-centred attitudes about appropriating nature; making a responsible contribution to community life; joining one’s personal action to that of many others; working for peace and brotherhood among peoples; and inciting institutions at various levels to reorient the economy, the law, and international conventions. Among other things, this entails developing democratic decision-making processes based on active citizen participation, such as the local 21 Agendas.

### *Aesthetic Education*

Both artistic splendour and the beauty of the creation are an occasion for education. But we must be careful to avoid the temptation of exploiting the beauty of nature for tourism:

Our very contact with nature has a deep restorative power; contemplation of its magnificence imparts peace and serenity. The Bible speaks again and again of the goodness and beauty of creation, which is called to glorify God (cf. *Gen* 1:4ff; *Ps* 8:2; 104:1ff; *Wis* 13:3-5; *Sir* 39:16, 33; 43:1, 9). More difficult perhaps, but no less profound, is the contemplation of the works of human ingenuity. Even cities can have a beauty all their own, one that ought to motivate people to care

for their surroundings. Good urban planning is an important part of environmental protection, and respect for the natural contours of the land is an indispensable prerequisite for ecologically sound development. The relationship between a good aesthetic education and the maintenance of a healthy environment cannot be overlooked. (John Paul II, 1989, ¶ 14)

### *Educational Themes*

Educational themes can also be classified as the “theological” virtues that are the gift of God (faith, hope, charity) and the four “cardinal” virtues (justice, prudence, fortitude, temperance) which Catholic doctrine prescribes for the faithful. These virtues then become *ecological virtues*.

*Faith*, founded on the “theology of nature” (i.e., at the divine source of creation), leads humans to measure progress by something other than the so-called indicators of well-being, and not to absolutize human capabilities. *Hope* will help keep Christians from falling into a “religion of well-being” or expecting happiness from worldly goods and technology. And the virtue of *charity* will produce a caring attitude and keep human beings from subjecting “nature to self-centred and greedy exploitation in the name of one’s own personal interest” (Rock, 1980, p. 241).

*Justice*, in its biblical sense, means accepting the place that human beings have in the order of the universe, and having a reverent respect for all forms of life. *Prudence* signifies circumspect and responsible action when making everyday choices, and being conscious of the “wonderful interconnection between all things in the world” (Golser, 2002, p. 142). *Fortitude* means courage, commitment, constant dialogue, and trust in the possibility of an ecological conversion of humankind. *Temperance*, finally, refers to the frequently mentioned acceptance of human limits, the need to prevent all forms of waste, and to be satisfied with even a little (Golser, 2002).

These educational topics are put into practice through numerous initiatives and campaigns, which are the work of the Conference of Bishops in the individual countries and/or ecumenical collaborations with other Christian churches. Examples include the Canadian network Kairos, the North American NACCE (North American Conference on Christianity and Ecology) and NRPE (National Religious Partnership for Environment), the European ECEN (European Christian Environmental Network), the Swiss COTE (Communauté œcuménique de travail Église et environnement), and many others (e.g., Sheldon, 1992; Simula, 2001; Stenger, 2005).

### Conclusions

To recapitulate, the Catholic Church can make an important contribution to the dispute over the *epistemology of dominion*, first, by spreading an environmental ethic among communities of the faithful and by calling on every

single human being to become personally responsible; and second, thanks to its diffuse presence in the world and the organizational strength of its structures and channels of communication and education, by performing a fundamental role in the non-formal and informal education in particular. It can make an appeal to that great throng of faithful, of all ages, for whom environmental education actions are not strong, but urgent and valuable all the same.

But we must also admit that the picture painted by this article is not entirely positive. Even for Catholic eco-theologians themselves (e.g., Terrin, 2003), the ecological responsibility of the Catholic Church still shows a certain weakness. Few dioceses are concretely involved, and however numerous they may be, the examples of ecological commitment are not up to par with what is needed. The churchpeople, the parishes, and the great and powerful religious institutions are often conditioned by special interests and materialism, tempted by the siren of political influence and privileges, or simply still prisoners of the “anthropological error” denounced by John Paul II. The *ecological conversion* must still win over a greater number of disciples among Catholics.

If it manages to do so, Catholicism can effectively offer two great resources (to cite two examples) for the environmental education of adults:

- The first is *monasticism*, which for many centuries has been proposing a model of life based on simplicity and moderation, as well as “best practices” for the wise and balanced management of natural areas (a large national park came into being in Italy, for example, because of the way the monks from Camaldoli took care of the forests in the Middle Ages). And many monasteries today have also become centres for ecology, ecumenical initiatives, and world peace.
- The second is *associationism*, which is a traditional component of Catholicism and concerns all areas of society. Through associationism and a message of social justice and peace, Catholic environmental education can reach hundreds of millions of people throughout the world. It can also make a plea to non-Catholics and non-Christians and create concrete changes in attitudes and lifestyles. And, despite the troubles that *homo sapiens sapiens* have caused (and can continue to cause) themselves and the planet, even non-Christians and atheists will welcome the help of Catholics if they share an ethic of care and of life.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The biblical quotations are from *New American Bible* (2002), Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (retrieved December 1, 2005, from <http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/index.htm>).
- <sup>2</sup> A number of original sources in this paper use “man,” “mankind,” “he,” or “his” throughout. In keeping with the original sources, this language has not been changed to reflect current editorial guidelines.

## Notes on Contributor

**Mario Salomone** is a contract professor of environmental education at the University of Bergamo, Italy, a founding editor of *eco l'educazione sostenibile*, the Italian monthly environmental education publication, and organized the 3<sup>rd</sup> World Environmental Education Congress (October 2005). His publications include *Mondo intorno, mondo dentro* (2004), and *Strategie educative per las sostenibilità* (2005), both published by CELSB in Bergamo. **Contact:** Università di Bergamo di Scienze della Persona, piazzale S. Agostino, 2, 24129 Bergamo (Italy); [mario.salomone@unibg.it](mailto:mario.salomone@unibg.it)

## References

- Bianchi, E. (2003). *Le ragioni cristiane dell'ecologia*. Treviso: Editrice San Liberale.
- Brena, G. L. (2003). Ecologia e teologia: presupposti per una convergenza. In A. N. Terrin (Ed.), *Ecologia e liturgia* (pp. 49-89). Padova: Edizioni Messaggero Padova.
- Brena, G. L. (Ed.). (2005). *Etica pubblica ed ecologia*. Padova: Edizioni Messaggero Padova.
- Common Declaration of John Paul II and the Ecumenic Patriarch his Holiness Bartholomew I, Monday, 10 June 2002*. Retrieved December 1, 2005, from [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)
- Conigliaro, F. (2005). Ecologia e teologia. In G. L. Brena (Ed.), *Etica pubblica ed ecologia* (pp. 47-103). Padova: Edizioni Messaggero Padova.
- Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation Dei Verbum Solemnly Promulgated by His Holiness Pope Paul VI on November 18, 1965*. Retrieved April 2, 2006, from [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651118\\_dei-verbum\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html)
- Golser, K. (2002). Virtù ecologiche. In *Ufficio nazionale per i problemi sociali e del lavoro, Servizio nazionale per il progetto culturale, Responsabilità per il Creato. Un sussidio per le comunità* (pp. 141-142). Leuman (Torino): Elledici.
- Golser, K. (2005). Teologia e spiritualità della creazione. In F. Facchini (Ed.), *Un ambiente per l'uomo* (pp. 13-34). Bologna: Dehoniane.
- Greco, C. & Muratore, S. (Eds.). (1998). *La conoscenza simbolica*. Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo.
- John Paul II. (1989). *Message of his Holiness Pope John Paul II for the celebration of the World Day of Peace 1 January 1990*. Retrieved December 1, 2005, from [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)
- John Paul II. (1991). *Centesimus annus*. Retrieved December 1, 2005, from [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_01051991\\_centesimus-annus\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_01051991_centesimus-annus_en.html)
- John Paul II. (1995). *Ioannes Paulus PP. II, Evangelium Vitae. To the bishops priests and deacons men and women religious lay faithful and all people of good will on the value and inviolability of human life*. Retrieved December 1, 2005, from [www.vatican.va/](http://www.vatican.va/)

- holy\_father/john\_paul\_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf\_jp-ii\_enc\_25031995\_evangelium-vitae\_en.html
- John Paul II. (2001). *General audience: Wednesday 17 January 2001*. Retrieved December 1, 2005, from [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/audiences/2001/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_aud\\_20010117\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/audiences/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_20010117_en.html)
- Keenan, M. (2002). *From Stockholm to Johannesburg: An historical overview of the concern of the Holy See for the environment 1972-2002*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- Messina, M. (2005). La teologia dell'ambiente. *.eco l'educazione sostenibile*, 7, 21-23.
- Morandini, S. (2005). *Teologia ed ecologia*. Brescia: Morcelliana.
- Nash, R. (1989). *The rights of nature*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes on The Church in the Modern World Promulgated by His Holiness, Pope Paul VI on December 7, 1965*. Retrieved December 1, 2005, from [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_cons\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html)
- Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. (2004). *Compendium of the social doctrine of the Church*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- Rock, M. (1980). La teologia della natura e le sue implicazioni etico-antropologiche. In S. Dellavalle (Ed.), *Per un agire ecologico. Percorsi di lettura attraverso l'etica ambientalisti* (pp. 218-242). Milano: Baldini & Castoaldi. Original edition: *Theologie der Natur und ihre anthropologisch-ethischen Konsequenzen*. In D. Birnbacher (Ed.), *Ökologie und Ethik* (pp. 72-102). Stuttgart: Reclam.
- Salomone, M. (2005a). *Strategie educative per la sostenibilità. L'educazione ambientale nel XXI secolo*. Bergamo: CELSB.
- Salomone, M. (2005b). Environmental education and the future of the Earth. *.eco .l L'educazione sostenibile*, 7, 6-7.
- Sauvé, L. (2000). Environmental education between modernity and postmodernity: Searching for an integrative educational framework. In A. Jarnet, B. Jickling, L. Sauvé, A. Wals, & P. Clarkin (Eds.), *The future of environmental education in a postmodern world?* (pp. 44-56). Whitehorse: Yukon College.
- Sheldon, J. K. (1992). *Rediscovery of creation: A bibliographical study of the Church's response to the environmental crisis*. Metuchen, NJ: The American Theological Library Association.
- Simula, A. (2001). *In pace con il creato. Chiesa cattolica ed ecologia*. Padova: Edizioni Messaggero Padova.
- Stenger, M. (Ed.). (2005). *Planète vie, planète mort: L'heure des choix*. Paris: Editions du Cerf.
- Terrin, A. N. (Ed.). (2003). *Ecologia e liturgia*. Padova: Edizioni Messaggero Padova.
- WEEC (2005, October). *Guidelines of the Torino World Congress for wide-ranging environmental education, founded on solid ethical and epistemological bases*. 3<sup>rd</sup> World Environmental Education Congress, Torino, Italy.
- Wénin, A. (2003). L'umanità e il creato: dominio e mitezza. In A. N. Terrin (Ed.), *Ecologia e liturgia* (pp. 23-47). Padova: Edizioni Messaggero Padova.
- White, L. Jr. (1967). The historical roots of our ecological crisis. *Science*, 155, 1203-1207.