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Solidarity with Creation: Uncovering the hidden foundations

Solidarity and the Conflict Over the Human Person

The self-governing trade union “Solidarność” (“Solidarity”) was born in the crucible of the conflict between Polish culture and Soviet Communism. However, it did not allow Marxist ideology to dictate the terms of the confrontation. Communism in Poland was not combatted on the level of an “us” versus “them” dichotomy, for it was this form of existential antagonism that Communists used to fuel their blood-stained brand of “progress” in which the idealized future took on more importance than the present and the people who inhabited it. This disdain for the actuality of reality and its truth explains both Communism’s dependence on brutality and its fundamental unsustainability. Józef Tischner, Polish priest, philosopher, theologian, and first chaplain of “Solidarity,” summarized the meaning of solidarity from its outset as “one born from the pages and the spirit of the gospel, [which] does not need an enemy or opponent to strengthen itself and to grow. It turns towards all and not against anyone.”¹ In 1980, after over thirty years of Communist rule in Poland, Solidarity showed the power of this unifying message

1 J. Tischner, *The Spirit of Solidarity*, San Francisco 1984, p. 3.

as over 10 million members – a third of all Polish workers – flocked to its ranks during its first year.

Solidarity offered a new kind of community, one radically different than that proposed by Communism. As Tischner described it in a 1988 interview, Communist “community” existed at the expense of the individual, on the basis of power and uniformity of speech and even conscience. The suspicion that you thought for yourself could put your livelihood and even your life at risk. A Christian community like Solidarity was diametrically opposed to this view because it was born out of the gospel, “because of the Word,” “the Word of God and... the human word. This is a community of people who talk to and trust each other and who, in the end, love one another.”²

Solidarity not only had an overwhelming reception among workers, but also among the Polish intelligentsia. Bolstered by the election of Cardinal Karol Wojtyła as Pope John Paul II in 1978, the social movement took on significant philosophical overtures centered principally on ethics and the dignity of the human person. In fact, “the person” emerged as the central locus of the divergence between Communist ideology and Christian thought. When asked if he would “define the essence of the conflict between Communism and Christianity” as a “conflict over the person,” Tischner responded: “Yes. I would say that this was not a conflict over God as much as it was a conflict over man.”³

Pope John Paul II had already established himself as a leading thinker on the status and nature of the human person with his books, *Love and Responsibility*⁴ and *The Acting Person*⁵ – a phenomenological analysis of human subjectivity integrated into the vision of the human being intrinsic to Thomas Aquinas’s metaphysics.⁶ This Thomistic influence, primarily through the

2 J. Tischner, interview with T. Witkowski, “Documentation: An Interview with Rev. Jozef Tischner,” *Crisis Magazine*, 1 June 1988, <https://www.crisismagazine.com/1988/documentation-an-interview-with-rev-jozef-tischner>.

3 *Ibidem*.

4 Published in Poland in 1960 and in the United States in 1981.

5 Published in Poland in 1969 and in the United States in 1979.

6 “For Wojtyła, both metaphysical and phenomenological reflections are necessary to account adequately for the subjective and objective dimensions of human existence’ and therefore ‘the originality of his philosophical method consists in his

Lublin School, would be crucial to the development and application of the concept of the person, but also to the reaffirmation of an entire metaphysical vision of the cosmos that Communism had sought tirelessly to stamp out. While the affirmation of the dignity of the human person was at the heart of both Solidarity and John Paul II's mission, the ontological underpinnings of this dignity speak to a covenantal relationship between God and man, within which all of creation is caught up. It is for this reason that John Paul II spoke of the person's need for a four-fold reconciliation: with oneself, with God, with others, and with all of creation. It is also for this reason that he warned increasingly of the need to care for creation, not only as pertains to justice for the poor or future generations, but as a component of a primordial solidarity.

Fundamentally, solidarity is about how we understand our relationships, most commonly the relationship between the person and society. True solidarity marks a higher ground, above the pendulum of earthly politics that swings from a complete submission of the individual to society – as in Communism – to a society based in the law of *homo homini lupus*, representing an unbridled individualism and autonomy. While the structures of solidarity must be built through great effort, in accordance with subsidiarity, solidarity itself must be discovered as anterior, as given, as the gift of belonging: to one's family, to one's nation, to humanity, and to the entire communion of being. Only when these fundamental relationships are discovered as intrinsically given (not extrinsically added on) and bolstered by the virtues of *caritas* and *philadelphia* can solidarity remain true to itself. In this way, solidarity avoids the pragmatic and contractual use of others for one's own ends, not out of sheer willpower to adhere to an altruistic ideal, but through the discovery of and assent to the truth that the good of the other (*caritas* and *philadelphia*) and the good of the whole (*solidarity*) are intrinsic to one's own good as a person.

attempt to recover the unity between the objective and subjective dimensions in man and to give an adequate response to the modern problem of the subject-object dichotomy.” Vilma Sliuzaitė quoted in T. Rowland, *Doing Catholic Theology*, London 2017, p. 70.

In this essay we will reflect on the notion of solidarity with creation as an implicit part of what it means to be a human person from a metaphysical standpoint and as an urgent necessity on the political front around the world. Political conditions have changed dramatically in the forty years since the foundation of Solidarity, not only due to the downfall of Soviet Communism, but perhaps more importantly due to the continued expansion of Marxist ideology into other Western democracies.⁷ Let us begin with an assessment of the historical and political conditions before delving into man's ontological communion and its significance within the current context.

Why Do We Need Solidarity with Creation?

In a 1988 interview in the United States, Tischner pointed to the essential role ethics and civil disobedience played in post-war Poland, commenting on the different perception present in the U.S.:

Here [in the United States], at least in principle, significant portions of ethics have become a part of the lawmaking process. Law transformed ethical principles into legal norms... It is different in totalitarian countries where the law serves to strengthen the hand of the authorities, to consolidate force. And ethics often appears not as a part of the law or in support of the law but as its contradiction. In the name of ethics, people behave lawlessly. In Poland it is thus: no matter how many times a woman comes to a doctor to ask for an abortion, a doctor must do it, regardless of whether he is a Catholic or not. And if he doesn't do it, he will lose his job. The law operates against ethics here. That is why ethics has taken on enormous significance in postwar Poland. One could say that it has become one of the chief weapons in the struggle with coercion. Drawing on ethics, on a traditional moral code, is central to our polemics with force.

7 This has occurred in large part through what Antonio Gramsci called "a 'war of position,' a quiet, behind-the-scenes attempt to improve one's position through the acquisition of bureaucratic power, giving one authority over future appointments and curriculum development" (*ibidem*, p. 2).

While the U.S. has known its fair share of civil disobedience, most especially the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, and is better off for it, such civil disobedience was not a political revolution but a radical (from *radix*, “root”) *return* to the essential principles of American democracy: namely, the fundamental belief that truth and human dignity are *anterior* to the law and that it is the government’s central and sacred purpose to defend them. Thomas Jefferson⁸ could not have been more clear when, in 1776, he penned the words,

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights; that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed...⁹

It is this commonly-held equality in dignity before God, and *only* this, that prevents the worst form of democracy from taking hold, that which Socrates warned against: the unbridled rule of the majority.¹⁰ Government was created to check that base force, not enshrine it.

However, the “consent of the governed” must always be held in highest esteem if a people are to remain free and government is to avoid falling into authoritarianism. As Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger pointed out, this distinctive Anglo-Saxon comprehension of democracy was born out of a Judeo-Christian milieu and was thus dependent upon religious culture for its continual spiritual undergirding.¹¹ John Adams, one of the founding fathers and second president of the United States, declared uncompromisingly: “Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious People. It is wholly inadequate

8 Jefferson, who was a slave owner, is certainly open to criticism but his words stand as a testament to the ideal that would eventually come to dominate the American consciousness.

9 “Declaration of Independence: A Transcription,” National Archives, 4 July 1776, <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>.

10 Cf. M. Friedman, R. Friedman, “Created Equal,” in: *Free to Choose: A personal statement*, New York, NY 1990, pp. 128–49.

11 J. Ratzinger, *Values in a Time of Upheaval*, San Francisco 2006, p. 63.

to the government of any other.”¹² It is no surprise then that the two greatest civil rights heroes of the English-speaking world, Martin Luther King Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi, both drew on the Christian principles of non-violent resistance and a higher law that give legitimacy to civil law only when the latter is inspired by the former.¹³

However, Ratzinger discusses a second concept of democracy, opposed to the first both in its conception of the truth and its relationship to Christianity. This form of democracy is attributed to Rousseau and holds that truth is not antecedent to government or law but a product of it.¹⁴ Under this form, one could say that through the procedures of democracy – popular voting and representation – truth is produced, not discovered. This form of democracy is antithetical to Christianity and paints the Judeo-Christian assertion of antecedent truth – and the natural law it implies – as tyrannical impositions. However, the very opposite is true. Every authoritarianism is recognized by its self-attribution of the right to define what is good and evil, true and false, at the expense of the most basic human rights. It is for this reason that in 1948 – after the horrors of two world wars, the Holodomor, and the Holocaust – the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations with 48 of 58 member countries voting in favor, zero against, and the majority of abstentions coming from the Soviet Bloc.¹⁵

12 J. Adams, “From John Adams to Massachusetts Militia, 11 October 1798,” National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-3102>.

13 Gandhi was a student of Christianity and incorporated aspects of Christian *caritas* – most notably love of one’s enemies – into the Hindu concept of *ahimsa*, meaning primarily “non-violence.” Referring to Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians, he would explain: “*Ahimsa* means ‘Love’ in the Pauline sense...” (M. Gandhi, “With Our Guests,” *Harijan* 4.5 (14 March 1936), p. 39). Gandhi would also claim inspiration from Jesus’ sacrifice: “Though I cannot claim to be a Christian in the sectarian sense, the example of Jesus’ suffering is a factor in the composition of my undying faith in non-violence which rules all my actions worldly and temporal” (M. Gandhi, “Is Non-Violence Ineffective?,” *Harijan* 6.48 (7 January 1939), p. 417).

14 J. Ratzinger, *Values in a Time...*, pp. 63–64.

15 “International Bill of Human Rights: Universal Declaration of Human Rights: resolution / adopted by the General Assembly,” United Nations Digital Library, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/670964>.

Here it is crucial to point out two realities about the Rousseauian proposition. First, it contains the very same epistemological agnosticism and authoritarian mentality as Soviet Communism: that government determines the truth even at the expense of so-called universal human rights. Second, with its proceduralism, ambiguity, and veneer of fairness, the Rousseauian proposition has slowly overcome the Anglo-Saxon model of democracy based on unalienable rights endowed by our Creator. Nowhere is this more evident than in the slow perversion of the field of bioethics, which was created to defend the weak and ill, but instead has become the disciplinary matrix by which their marginalization and elimination is not only permitted, but is justified as an “ethical” duty.¹⁶ The same United Nations that ratified the Universal Declaration of Human Rights now has members who seek to enshrine euthanasia and abortion as “human rights.”¹⁷

The ethics Tischner spoke of based on the natural law and the pre-political consciousness of the Solidarity movement, which found support beyond the Iron Curtain in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Anglo-Saxon ideal of democracy, have been greatly suppressed. Rather, “democracy” and “ethics” have been subverted into tools for the justification of the destruction of the human rights for which Tischner, John Paul II, and Solidarity fought.

Thomistic Personalism played a significant role in the creation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights through the influence of Jacques Maritain. It was also crucial in the notion of human rights employed by Solidarity and the Catholic Church in Poland against Communism and whose greatest expositor and popularizer was Pope John Paul II.¹⁸ While he found Aquinas’s teachings fundamentally true, they were also “very objectivistic” and required

16 Cf. M. Taylor, “The Person and the Leviathan: The Technological Paradigm in Contemporary Liberal Bioethics,” in: *The Foundations of Nature: Metaphysics of gift for an integral ecological ethic*, Eugene, OR 2020, pp. 79–117.

17 “Vatican Tells UN it is ‘Deeply Concerned’ by Push to ‘Reinterpret’ Foundations of Human Rights,” *Catholic News Agency*, 7 October 2020, <https://www.catholic-newsagency.com/news/vatican-tells-un-it-is-deeply-concerned-by-pressure-to-reinterpret-the-very-foundations-of-human-rights-95796>.

18 Cf. K. Wojtyła, “Thomistic Personalism,” in: *Person and Community: Selected essays*, translated by T. Sandok, OSM, New York 1993, pp. 165–75.

further development for the needs of the Church in the twentieth century. In his 1961 essay entitled “Thomistic Personalism” he wrote, “St. Thomas gives us an excellent view of the objective existence and activity of the person, but it would be difficult to speak in his view of the lived experiences of the person.”¹⁹ Thomistic Personalism explored that lived experience and drew attention to the dignity of the human person. In the face of Communism’s evolutionary materialism, its truth struck at the heart of Marxist anthropology. However, John Paul II was well aware that this was only the tip of the spear for the reaffirmation of an entire cosmic vision originating from the Creator and expressed in its fullness in Aquinas’s metaphysics of creation. At Chernobyl, the world was witness to how, in its refusal to live by the truth of reality, Communist ideology offended not only the dignity of the human person, but that of the whole of Creation.²⁰

It is significant that John Paul II began to bring attention to the crises suffered by the natural world in his very first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis*, in 1979. He discussed the goodness of creation, lamented the evil of investing in weapons rather than putting those resources towards improving infertile regions of the world “at the service of life,” and reminded us that all of creation “waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.”²¹ The importance of reestablishing a proper relationship with creation would appear again and again, entering into the Social Doctrine of the Church through

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 170.

²⁰ This offense was not primarily that of using nuclear energy, one of the safest and least polluting forms of energy creation (though Wes Jackson’s call to “stay out of the nuclei” echoes prophetically today), but in the suppression of scientific results that indicated an inherent flaw in the design of the Communist nuclear reactors (Wes Jackson quoted in W. Berry, *Life is a Miracle: An essay against modern superstition*, Berkeley 2001, p. 76). For more on the Soviet RBMK reactors, see A. Higginbotham, “Secrets of the Peaceful Atom,” in: *Midnight in Chernobyl: The untold story of the world’s greatest nuclear disaster*, New York 2019, pp. 60–74.

²¹ John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, 4 March 1979, http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_04031979_redemptor-hominis.html, §8, quoting Romans 8:19.

his social encyclicals,²² introducing the concept “human ecology,”²³ and even making its way into the Catechism of the Catholic Church.²⁴

Perhaps the fullest and most direct expression of this concern came in the Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace on January 1, 1990 entitled “Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation.”²⁵ In it John Paul II decried the mistreatment of creation and stated that “the right to a safe environment... must be included in an updated Charter of Human Rights.”²⁶ He argued that “the ecological crisis reveals the urgent moral need for a new solidarity” among nations in order to protect the created order.²⁷ In concluding, he extends respect for the dignity of the human person “also to the rest of creation, which is called to join man in praising God” while uniting the concepts of peace with God, with all of creation, and among all peoples as “inseparable.”²⁸

This emphasis on peace with creation and the call to a new solidarity was significant given that the Pope’s words were penned less than a month after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the defeat of the ideology he had combatted his entire adult life. At the dawn of this new era, as formerly-Communist countries reformed their governments around democratic principles, Pope John Paul II saw the urgent need for the West to return to the truth of creation. In *Veritatis Splendor* (1993) he would write:

22 See *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987), *Centesimus Annus* (1991), and *Evangelium Vitae* (1995).

23 John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 1 May 1991, http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_01051991_centesimus-annus.html, §38–40.

24 See the discussion of the first line of the Apostolic Creed, particularly the discussion of the visible world: “Paragraph 5. Heaven and Earth,” *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/___P1A.HTM, §337–354.

25 John Paul II, “Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation,” 1 January 1990, http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html.

26 *Ibidem*, §9.

27 *Ibidem*, §10.

28 *Ibidem*, §16.

Law must therefore be considered an expression of divine wisdom: by submitting to the law, freedom submits to the truth of creation. Consequently one must acknowledge in the freedom of the human person the image and the nearness of God, who is present in all (cf. *Eph* 4:6). But one must likewise acknowledge the majesty of the God of the universe and revere the holiness of the law of God, who is infinitely transcendent: *Deus semper maior*.²⁹

Thus, it is only through the recognition and assent to *the truth of creation* – which speaks not only of the dignity of the person but of the dignity of the entire created order – that democracies can be built that will protect peace, justice, and human dignity. The near-universal recognition of human dignity – through the efforts of Thomistic Personalism and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – effectively countered the false anthropology of Communism throughout the 1980s. However, this would not be enough to sustain the battle for the truth of the human person in the context of the capitalistic and consumerist culture that was already falling into a different yet equally materialistic conception of human flourishing.

Following John Paul II, we must learn to see the entire order of the cosmos as an expression of the truth that resonates within us thanks to our creation by God. To recognize and live out this solidarity with all of creation was the Pope’s urgent desire for mankind and continues to be the most pressing concern for the health of our societies, the justice of our laws, and the spiritual and physical well-being of all. Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis would continue to teach along these lines to the present day.

A Deeper Appraisal of Solidarity with Creation

In a telling passage, the Catechism, updated under John Paul II in 1992, states: “There is a *solidarity among all creatures* arising from the fact that all have the same Creator and are all ordered to his glory.”³⁰ This solidarity

29 John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor.html, §41.

30 “Paragraph 5. Heaven and Earth,” §344.

is not a temporary one meant to last only as long as we share this earthly pilgrimage, but one marked with eschatological significance, for just a few lines down the Catechism further illuminates the nature of this bond: “Man, and through him all creation, is destined for the glory of God.”³¹ The human person is revealed as a crucial member in the communion of all creatures, with a substantial responsibility.

In order to understand more deeply the meaning of this calling we must overcome the philosophical blindness that has weakened Western thought for more than four centuries: the Cartesian dualism that led to the doubt and skepticism about reason that gave rise to postmodernism.³² We must start from a position of openness and common sense. We must learn to trust in the intelligibility of reality again and our own reason as a natural manifestation of that reality. In 2009, Benedict XVI called for

a new trajectory of thinking [which] is needed in order to arrive at a better understanding of the implications of our being one family... so that integration can signify solidarity rather than marginalization. Thinking of this kind requires a *deeper critical evaluation of the category of relation*. This is a task that cannot be undertaken by the social sciences alone, insofar as the contribution of disciplines such as metaphysics and theology is needed if man’s transcendent dignity is to be properly understood.³³

31 *Ibidem*, §353.

32 “[W]e have to overcome a certain blindness to the primal value of being. This sick blindness is called Positivism, and it arises from regarding reality as raising no questions, being ‘just there’... When men are blind to the further question, it signifies the death of philosophy... For philosophy begins with the astonished realization that I am this particular individual in being and goes on to see all other existent entities together with me in being; that is, it begins with the sense of wonder that, astonishingly, I am ‘gifted,’ the recipient of gifts” (H.U. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama II: The Dramatis Personae; Man in God*, translated by G. Harrison, San Francisco 2000, p. 286).

33 Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 29 June 2009, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html, §53.

For his part, Stratford Caldecott echoed this call for a “return to metaphysics”; that is, to a renewed appreciation of ontology and symbolism,” adding however, that “this time around, we must find a place for the rest of nature in our philosophy.”³⁴ This new trajectory and this return to metaphysics finds its root at the very origin of philosophical thinking: the appraisal of wonder as the birthplace and constant companion of true philosophy. The synthesis of Platonic and Aristotelian elements and the novel integration of the primordial act of being in Thomas Aquinas’s metaphysics represent the fundamental elements for the comprehension of the truth of creation. This is the very same metaphysical vision that underlies the Thomistic personalism that came to express the essence of the dignity of the human person, and so this broader conception of a metaphysics of creation preserves and builds on these truths.

I have discussed this vision, from Thomas through some of its greatest modern exponents, elsewhere as a “metaphysics of gift.”³⁵ There is a great deal that could be discussed here; however, I will offer just an outline of those findings in order to address why a true solidarity with creation is necessary to uphold the dignity of the human person, the truth of creation, and the health of our democracies.

The experience of philosophical wonder reveals a great deal about the relationship between the intellect and reality. It is best described as the subjective experience of a person before the objective giftedness and superabundance of reality, our own and that of all of creation.³⁶ We are not the source of our own being; rather, it comes to us gratuitously together with a host of relations and conditions that give form to our life, from our personal share in universal human nature down to the uniqueness of our fingerprints. However, these determinations do not reduce our freedom in any essential way, but rather

34 S. Caldecott, *The Radiance of Being: Dimensions of cosmic Christianity*, Tacoma 2013, p. 81.

35 These exponents include Erich Przywara, Ferdinand Ulrich, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and David L. Schindler. See M. Taylor, *The Foundations of Nature...*

36 David L. Schindler describes wonder and gift as “onto-logically inseparable,” for they are “the same reality viewed, respectively, subjectively and objectively” (D.L. Schindler, “The Given as Gift: Creation and Disciplinary Abstraction in Science,” *Communio* 38.1 (2011), p. 87).

give it a form and a *telos*.³⁷ The path to freedom and to fulfillment starts in the wonder at and gratitude for the givenness of reality, beginning with one's personal reality. Modern freedom will hear of no such thing and only accepts the bounds of scientific progress as temporary limitations on its ambitions. Paradoxically, the gift of substantiality, of possessing a limited and limiting nature, is the narrow gate that opens upon definitive and fulfilling possibilities. Human nature opens onto the greatest of horizons, but only through the humble acceptance of the truth of creation and the guideposts this sets for our freedom.

Along with our substantiality, we are granted myriad relations that are the very bonds that give orientation and purpose to existence. Without family, community, and nation, the human person is not freed but alienated from an existence rooted in meaning. Cardinal Ratzinger once wrote that "*relatio* stands beside the substance as an equally primordial form of being."³⁸ The fundamental relationship that all existing beings share and in which they are all united is that which holds us in existence in every instant: the gratuitous participation of being from God.³⁹ The communion of being is radically contingent upon this continuous gift.

The foundational paradox of being, observed by Aquinas and meditated on fruitfully ever since, is that being itself is perfect yet does not subsist: *Esse significat aliquid completum et simplex sed non subsistens*.⁴⁰ This means that at the heart of existence, and permeating all of reality, is a primordial act of self-donation. In the words of Caldecott, "the act of being is an act

37 Freedom is found in embracing the truth of reality, one's own and the conditions of life. An athlete will never be successful as an athlete if he or she does not commit wholeheartedly to the sport to which he or she is naturally inclined.

38 J. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, translated by J.R. Foster, San Francisco 2004, p. 183.

39 Thus Aquinas concludes that God is present in every thing that exists, according to its mode of being. See T. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Westminster, MD 1981, book I, 8.1.

40 "*Esse* signifies that which is complete and simple yet non-subsistent" (T. Aquinas, *Questiones Disputatae de Potentia Dei*, translated by the English Dominican Fathers, Westminster, MD 1952, q. 1, a. 1, ad 1).

of giving, an act of knowing, an act of love.”⁴¹ Creation is the fruit of this radical gift of being whereby all things have come to be and continue to be in each instant, as it were, *ex nihilo*. It is this pattern that marks the entire cosmos and the more a creature participates in being, the more its law holds: perfection lies in the complete gift of oneself. It is seen for example in living creatures, in the way they give their entire existence for their progeny and their intimate interdependence, but it is especially true of the human person. It is no wonder that this is the very ideal of holiness and sainthood: to give oneself away entirely in love and service. This is not self-immolation, even for a martyr like Maximilian Kolbe who gave his life for that of another prisoner at Auschwitz, but a radical fulfillment of one’s fullest potential and entry into a more profound state of human existence through love.

The human person, being a spiritual and corporeal unity, possesses the greatest share in the participation of being and the greatest responsibility for the stewardship of the goodness, truth, and beauty of creation. Generally speaking, the common man has always done a good job of caring for the portion of creation from which he drew his livelihood because it would not support him and his family for long if he did not learn to do so. Local wisdom and sustainable practices were passed on from one generation to another. The land and its inhabitants were known intimately, by proper names and through daily contact. The horizon of human life was not limited to this earth as religion was the driving force for a culture based on a deep understanding of the truth of creation, even while technical and empirical knowledge lagged behind.⁴² To this day, in Europe, the areas around Catholic shrines and monasteries are considered havens of biodiversity that are of great interest for conservation.⁴³

41 S. Caldecott, *The Radiance of Being...*, pp. 181 ff. It was Ferdinand Ulrich who first provided a profound philosophical reflection on being-as-love in his magnum opus, *Homo Abyssus*. See F. Ulrich, *Homo Abyssus: The drama of the question of being*, translated by D.C. Schindler, Washington, DC 2018.

42 See P. Martínez de Anguita, *Environmental Solidarity: How religions can sustain sustainability*, New York 2012.

43 See the publications of Fabrizio Frascaroli, for example: F. Frascaroli, “Shepherds, Rituals, and the Sacred: A Biocultural View of the Non-Modern Ontologies of Folk Shrines and Devotions in Central Italy,” *Worldviews* 20 (2016), pp. 272–285.

It was modern man, with his scientific ambitions of dominating nature and maximizing output, that first began to lose sight of the giftedness of existence, and therefore, its meaning.⁴⁴ Metaphysical proposals were made and accepted that fundamentally changed the way we comprehended and related with the natural world. The goodness, truth, and beauty of creation were often reduced to its market prices, its empirical quantities, and a secondary aesthetic quality appreciated by artists and poets. It is no wonder that, where the human person shirks his responsibility, environmental degradation follows. Popes since Paul VI have denounced the abuses of creation, known only to the modern era in their scale and destructiveness.

Among environmentalists, one not-uncommon response to this degradation has been to see man, not as a caretaker responsible for remedying the situation, but as a virus or a cancer on the earth whose influence must be reduced if not eliminated.⁴⁵ They resort continually to dichotomies such as the instrumental versus the intrinsic value of nature and anthropocentric versus biocentric ethics. This is just another instance of the conflict born of modern philosophy versus postmodern philosophy, both lacking the capacity to find a resolution. The root of the problem remains firmly planted in the metaphysical dimension, where we have the freedom to accept the truth of creation or try to create our own. Both modern and postmodern cultures hold fundamentally materialistic presuppositions about reality, according to either a dualistic or monistic worldview, and thus cannot help but lose sight of the deeper reality below the empirical surface of experience. Yet what we propose here as a solidarity with creation, through a metaphysics of gift, overcomes these dichotomies through the recognition and

44 “I am come in very truth leading to you Nature with all her children to bind her to your service and make her your slave” (F. Bacon, “The Masculine Birth of Time,” in: *The Philosophy of Francis Bacon*, translated by B. Farrington, Liverpool 1964, p. 62).

45 E.O. Wilson famously called for half the earth to be set apart as wilderness preserves untouched by man. The Voluntary Human Extinction Movement, which advocates for the end of human reproduction, is perhaps the most extreme view. See E.O. Wilson, *Half-Earth: Our planet's fight for life*, New York 2017; The Voluntary Human Extinction Movement, <http://www.vhemt.org/>, accessed: 15 March 2021.

illumination of a deeper covenant inherent to the community of being that needs no enemy or opponent to grow.

The negative anthropology of many postmodern environmentalists seems to be inspired more by guilt or cynicism than by contemplation or introspection. As Caldecott pointed out, it is more often frustration and hopelessness born of the failures that follow after pursuing a line of action based in this deficient comprehension of reality:

Probably a majority of environmentalists do not see the relevance of religion or personal virtue and morality to the great issues of our day. To them this is just one more technical or political challenge to be solved, and that is where the problem lies. Viewing things this way, they will try to get their hands on the relevant levers of power and will be increasingly, and everlastingly frustrated, to discover that all their attempts come to nothing or even make things worse. I don't mean to say that there is no point to political action but rather that the assumption that these problems are primarily political is a mistake.⁴⁶

Politics has its place, but we cannot look to politics for solutions to problems that emerge from a deeper crisis, especially when that crisis has tainted politics also. Politics does not exist to create truth but to safeguard it through the will of the people, and this truth is the truth of creation from which we draw both meaning and hope. Solidarity with creation comprehends the profound gratitude for the gift of existence and the recognition that the good of the other is one's own good. The meaning of life is enriched through the strengthening of the bonds of the communion of being through the affirmation of the dignity of each member and the gift of self in charity and solidarity.

46 S. Caldecott, "Environmental Solidarity: The Radiance of Hope," presentation, World Youth Day 2013, Rio de Janeiro, July 2013.

Hope in Solidarity

In his encyclical *Spe Salvi*, Benedict XVI said that:

All serious and upright human conduct is hope in action... Yet our daily efforts... either tire us or turn into fanaticism, unless we are enlightened by the radiance of the great hope that cannot be destroyed... If we cannot hope for more than is effectively attainable at any given time, or more than is promised by political or economic authorities, our lives will soon be without hope.⁴⁷

Despite the beauty and wisdom we can find in creation, this great hope, this *magna spes*, is not of this world. This world is fading away and we, who are only pilgrims here, “groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom 8:23). Some environmentalists point to this belief as the very root of the environmental crisis for, according to their reasoning, we have no reason to concern ourselves with nature if we have our eyes fixed on heaven.⁴⁸ This critique fails however to comprehend the cosmic vision of Christianity. For creation too “has been groaning in labor pains until now,” waiting “with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God” (Rom 8:22, 8:19). Truly creation too waits in hope that it “will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Rom 8:21),⁴⁹ but if we are attentive to Paul’s words, creation’s hope rests not only in God, but also in the human person.

And so we return to the Word of God, Jesus Christ, fully God and fully Man, who has achieved the final victory, for us and for all of creation. In the words of John Paul II:

47 Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, 30 November 2007, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20071130_spe-salvi.html, §35.

48 L. White, “The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis,” *Science* 155:3767 (1967), pp. 1203–1207.

49 See also Isa 65:17, Isa 66:22, Eph 1: 9–10, Col 1:19–20, 2 Pet 3:13, Rev 21:1–5.

The Incarnation of God the Son signifies the taking up into unity with God not only of human nature, but in this human nature, in a sense, of everything that is “flesh:” the whole of humanity, the entire visible and material world. The Incarnation, then, also has a cosmic significance, a cosmic dimension. The “first-born of all creation,” becoming incarnate in the individual humanity of Christ, unites himself in some way with the entire reality of man, which is also “flesh” – and in this reality with all “flesh,” with the whole of creation.⁵⁰

It is this cosmic liturgy that is repeated at every Mass. Just as we are called to participate in Christ’s suffering, we are called to participate in his redemption through our spiritual and physical offerings, as well as through our participation in and protection of the truth and order of creation. Commenting on the numerous places where scripture reveals the bond between the redemption of man and that of the whole of creation, John Paul II makes plain the fact that “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.”⁵¹ The protection of the truth of creation is not only pragmatically useful, morally correct, and politically fruitful; in its deepest sense, it is about redemption, it is about a hope that goes beyond this world.

In his encyclical on hope, Benedict XVI also pointed out that modern Christianity “has to a large extent restricted its attention to the individual and his salvation. In so doing it has limited the horizon of its hope and has failed to recognize sufficiently the greatness of its task.”⁵² Faith is not about a series of extrinsic norms that must be followed or rights that must be respected but about corresponding to the truth discovered in the covenant to which we belong and the cosmic liturgy within which we each have a role to play. It is time to broaden our attention to the entire community of being bound together by a foundational self-giving love and, in so doing,

⁵⁰ John Paul II, *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 18 May 1986, http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_18051986_dominum-et-vivificantem.html, §50.

⁵¹ John Paul II, “Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation,” §5.

⁵² Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, §25.

broaden the horizon of our hope. Thus, a deeper appreciation for solidarity with creation – in which democracies, rooted in the primordial truth of creation, protect the unalienable dignity of the human person – is an essential dimension of the great task we have before us.

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■ Summary

In its push towards democracy, “Solidarność” played a crucial role in countering Communism’s denial of the unalienable dignity of the human person from a non-antagonistic position based in the universal message of the Gospel. Pope John Paul II, through the Thomistic Personalism that was fundamental to the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights, fought tirelessly to reinstate the pre-political truth of this dignity throughout the West. However, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, in the face of a persistent materialism, his focus broadened to include a deeper consideration and stronger defence of the entire created order. Solidarity with creation speaks to the ontological covenant that undergirds the dignity of the human person and calls him or her to a temporal and eschatological responsibility for the created world that “waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God” (Rom 8:19). A deeper appreciation of and commitment to the metaphysical truths of reality implicit in solidarity with creation – participation, communion, and self-donation – are necessary for the health of our natural world as well as the health of our human communities and our democracies.

Keywords

solidarity, creation, democracy, metaphysics, human rights