

CHRISTOPHER J. THOMPSON

Beholding the Logos

The Church, the Environment, and the Meaning of Man

When I behold your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars which you set in place—
What is man that you should be mindful of him,
or the son of man that you should care for him? (Ps 8:4)

Introduction

TO BEHOLD THE HEAVENS AND GAZE upon the infinite expanse of a star-studded sky, indeed to ponder any vista of creation's splendor is to be drawn not merely into the mystery of creation, the intricacies of cause and effect; rather, to ponder the mystery of things is to be inevitably drawn into the meaning of the human person. The splendor of being thrusts us back upon ourselves and calls us to question the meaning of our own existence.¹

Does our Catholic intellectual tradition help us navigate such questions? Is there a distinctive Catholic voice crying in the wilderness?

If we are to live up to the claim made by Pope Paul VI in *Populorum progressio* and echoed again by Pope John Paul II in *Veritatis splendor* in which they speak of the Church as “an expert in humanity,”

we cannot be indifferent to these fundamental issues.² Ever ancient, ever new, the Church enters again into that perennial contemplation of creation and creature; it is an ancient exercise now framed in the more contemporary language of “environment,” “stewardship,” and “care of the earth.”

Without diminishing the necessary contributions of scientists, economists, philosophers, and theologians of other traditions, I propose that Catholicism, with its comprehensive theological anthropology and vision of the created order, is especially prepared to illuminate some of the most fundamental aspects of this complex problem. In contrast to those who have suggested that Christianity itself is the source of our environmental problems, I propose that the Church is our principal hope for renewing the face of the earth. All those who are concerned about the issues surrounding the care of the environment should recognize in the tradition of our common faith not the cause of the problem, but the hope for a way forward.

This bold claim has to overcome the inertia in the minds of those who see the Church, perhaps Christianity more generally, as the source of many of our environmental problems.

Christians and Creation

In a famous essay published in 1967 titled “The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis,” Professor Lynn White Jr. traces the roots of the current problem to that era in Western Christianity (around A.D. 1000) when a shift in the character of theological reflection upon the created order emerges—away from what might be considered a more contemplative and iconic appreciation, toward a greater emphasis on the analysis of the order of causality and the nature of the divine rationality at work.³ From this point on, White suggests, there emerged an increasing identification between knowing the world (*scientia*) and technically manipulating the world (*techne*), between the most reliable knowledge of the order of things and our

technological domination of things, with *techne* usurping the more contemplative, speculative character of a traditional *scientia*. Clearly, the transition didn't happen overnight, but by the time of the eighteenth century, the positing of the existence of God became increasingly unnecessary in constructing an understanding of the created order. Nature no longer disclosed the creative power of a personal God as much as a faceless system of a mechanistic order of causes.

White's thesis that the origins of our ecological crisis have their roots in Christianity has been frequently repeated in one form or another ever since, as others have suggested that religion, especially Western Christianity, is responsible for many of the environmental challenges we are now facing.

Roderick Nash, in his well-known work titled *Wilderness and the American Mind*, takes up this thesis about the Christian roots of our ecological distress, citing White's essay specifically.⁴ Nash traces the history of the efforts in the United States to preserve wilderness areas, giving special attention to the historic accomplishment achieved by the U. S. Congress: the Wilderness Preservation Act, signed into law in 1964.

Nash cites White's essay at the beginning of his study and from there argues that Christianity is replete with notions of man's unfettered dominion over the earth, an earth which is seen for the most part as a barren wasteland, fallen, and in need of his developing hand in order to be made useful. The Christian man dreams, Nash suggests, of a life without wilderness, and suggests that wilderness—that is, the totality of pristine, undeveloped regions—is seen in the Christian tradition as the sign of a divine curse and abandonment. To cite Nash, "If paradise was early man's greatest good, wilderness . . . was his greatest evil." Wilderness in his account points to everything that is not of God and thus not something that is to be valued, much less preserved or protected. "There was no fondness in the Hebraic tradition for wilderness itself," he claims, "[it] retained its significance as the environment of evil and hardship where spiritual catharsis occurred."⁵

This negative view continues through the New Testament, he says, and finds various spokesmen throughout the Christian tradition. In the more immediate context of American religious history, Nash points to Deism, transcendentalism, and more broadly to romanticism as the intellectual forebears of any authentic environmental awareness. Christian tradition, he argues, supports a kind of eco-ignorance.

To some extent, Nash's cultural history is borne out. We often find patterns of interests that oppose those concerned with the environment against those who might hold to a traditional Catholicism. But ought contemporary Catholics adopt such a narrative stance? Are we to understand our Catholicism, more broadly our Christianity, as the source of the environmental crisis? Are we being faithful witnesses of our own theological heritage when we see in the calls for environmental stewardship an antagonism and a challenge to our self-understanding?

While it is certainly true that there are passages in the Hebrew scriptures in which Israel is threatened to have her otherwise well-established lands rendered into a wasteland, it seems these passages are better understood as lessons in morality and fidelity to the covenant than as accounts of the value of the created order and its wilderness space as such. Nash's conclusion that wilderness spaces, places free from the influence of culture and development, should be understood as mere instruments of punitive instruction is simply overstated. While I do not suggest that there is a single vision of the value of the wilderness in the scriptures—it is mentioned some 247 times and forms a complex set of issues for much deeper consideration—it is not unfair to say that what emerges is a more nuanced and complex view than Nash suggests. Nowhere does he mention the creation accounts of Genesis in which the created order is pronounced by God to be, not just good, but very good. Nor can one easily reconcile Nash's view with such texts as the canticle of Azariah and his companions (as recorded in the book of Daniel) who, in the midst of the fiery furnace, call upon

all of creation to join in their litany of praise to the God who is to be “praised and exalted above all forever.” A similar sentiment is expressed through the author of Psalm 148, prayed today by millions of Jews and Christians around the world, which includes a celebration of the forces of nature—fire and hail, snow and mist—all causes for praise to the Creator.

In the New Testament, both John the Baptist and Christ himself experience in the wilderness a kind of divine tutorial. Not always an experience yielding pleasure or delight, it is nonetheless a sacred space in which one encounters the Divine, where creature and Creator may speak heart to heart.

The Logos theology of the early Church apologists points in a similar direction; namely, in encountering the beauty and splendor of the untamed order, one encounters the Logos, the second person of the Trinity, who is its source and summit.

Concerning the artistic tradition of the early Church, one recalls briefly the countless images in which the Christ, the Logos of creation, is situated against the backdrop of the entire created order, enthroned amidst the splendor of the universe. Consider, in particular, the image of Christ’s cross depicted in the mosaic of the apse of San Clemente in Rome. There the Cross is set amidst the splendid array of all manner of flora and fauna that surrounds it in illuminating gold and glory. It is simply one instance among hundreds that points to the affirmation of the splendor and dignity of “all creation, which rightly gives you praise.”

And yet, while the Catholic intellectual tradition has a long and rich history of contemplating the splendor of creation and its status as the *vestigia dei*, the divine impression of God, in some important ways one could argue that this dimension of the tradition has been insufficiently developed and is in need of further consideration precisely as it bears on the issue of environmental stewardship.

Even the efforts by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace to highlight the Church’s attitude toward environmental stewardship, summarized in the essay *From Stockholm to Johannesburg: An*

Historical Overview of the Concern of the Holy See for the Environment, 1972–2002, comments that “within the social teaching of the Catholic church, the environmental question is often considered of only recent concern.”⁶

Here, it seems, there is something of a discrepancy in our account, a fundamental contradiction in the exposition of the tradition: on the one hand, there appears to be an extensive tradition speaking of the beauty and value of the created order, its capacity to reveal a wise and loving creator; on the other, there is a ready admission, even on the part of the Church’s magisterium, that her doctrinal teachings on matters pertaining to the environment are conspicuously brief.

Is Nash correct in unmasking the true character of the Christian heritage as one that is fundamentally inimical to any kind of care of the earth? Is the emerging environmental awareness—so captivating to contemporary imaginations—on a collision course with Catholicism? Can Catholics be trusted as faithful stewards? And can we call upon our theological tradition to provide the intellectual resources to address the concerns in a theologically responsible manner? How can one reconcile an affirmation of the value and beauty of the created order with an apparent silence about the environment?

One could try to reconcile the elements by arguing that the issues of stewardship are especially acute only in the light of more recent technological developments and that the Church is not unexpectedly slow to develop a doctrinal position on these complex, but relatively new, matters. But this masks a potentially deeper issue and does not take sufficiently into consideration the marked difference in the development of thought among the secular and theological circles. It is interesting to note, for example, that *Gaudium et spes*, the Magna Carta for the Church in the modern world, makes scarcely any mention of the issue of the environment—this despite the fact that at the same time one of the most important pieces of legislation in environmental concerns was adopted and ratified here in the United States, namely, the Wilderness Preservation Act.

When one places such milestones in secular circles against the apparent silence of a Church hoping to come to terms with the modern world, a striking difference becomes apparent. What accounts for the discrepancies among narratives: an affirmation of the value of creation in the theological tradition; a silence concerning its care within ecological circles?

I suggest that the gap between our theological tradition affirming the value of creation and the more recent concern of environmental stewardship lies in the fact that the two orders are not synonymous. To speak of “creation” and to speak of the “environment” is to speak in two distinct modes. To put it succinctly: as far as Catholic theological tradition is concerned, the human person does not inhabit an environment; the human person inhabits a world, a created cosmos. And to conflate the two orders, as if we are speaking of the same things in the same way, distorts the issues at stake. Specifically, it disfigures the portrait of the human person who lies at the center of not merely an environment, but a created order.

Learning to appreciate the significance of the doctrine of creation, as opposed to developing a mere environmental sensitivity, provides both the necessary hermeneutic for an appropriation of the magisterial tradition as well as a sufficient caution for all those who are rightly interested in discerning the obligations of stewardship in a theologically responsible manner.

A World of Meaning

The Thomist philosopher Josef Pieper, in the second half of his famous essay *Leisure, the Basis of Culture*, speaks of the difference in meaning when we speak of something in a “location,” something in an “environment,” and something in a “world.”⁷ What differentiates the proper usage, Pieper argues, is not a consideration of the object’s ambient circumstances; rather it is the distinct capacities of the object itself. Thus, we can speak of the location of a rock, the location of shale, or the location of oil because rocks, shale, and oil are rather

simple in their operations, their activities. When it comes to plants and animals, however, we can speak not only of their location, but now it is appropriate to speak of their environment, because plants and animals do not merely occupy a position; rather, they inhabit a place and interact with the elements surrounding them, drawing the immediate resources into their more complex operations.

But there is only one kind of creature, Pieper suggests, who occupies a world, a cosmos, and it is precisely the human person. The human person, with his or her capacity for intellectual comprehension and understanding, does not merely occupy a location, does not merely interact with an environment, but is capable of unifying in a single intellectual insight, the orbit of a world, a cosmos in which he or she is situated. And it is this unique spiritual capacity that renders all conversations about “humans and their environment” simply inadequate.

This is the unique spiritual capacity of our species; it is what differentiates us from the rest of the created order; it is what establishes the basis of our claim to be the *imago dei*; and it is what grounds our position in a *world*—as more than creatures inhabiting an environment. To be human, Pieper writes, “is to know things beyond the ‘roof’ of the stars, to go beyond the trusted enclosures of the normal, to go beyond the ‘environment’ to the ‘world’ in which that environment is enclosed.”⁸

Thus, to persistently speak of humans and their environment without any reference to our status as intellectual creatures within an ordered cosmos is to reduce the human person to a mere animal among creatures; it is to deny the spiritual capacity of the human person as that intellectual being capable of unifying in a single intellectual apprehension, an ordered whole, a unified world; finally, it is to set in motion an inadequate anthropology and, thus, an inadequate grasp of the vocation of stewardship.

Pieper’s Thomism facilitated an integral vision of creation and man and provides for us a methodology still adequate to our contemporary tasks. What is needed is a renewal of such efforts in

which the integrated vision of Aquinas might be brought to bear upon these compelling questions—a “green Thomism,” if you will.

Ironically, it was Sigurd Olson, the Minnesota naturalist, who first introduced me to the insight of Josef Pieper, the Thomist. Olson appeals to Pieper’s essay on *Leisure* to explain the phenomenon of “awe,” the kind of rapt ecstasy that can so often overcome a person as he or she encounters the beauty of the wilderness.⁹

However, Olson suggests that such moments of awe—moments in which we discern an order to the whole of experience—are due to the biological origins of our species, in which case the feeling of awe before the splendor of some wilderness space is the tug of the collective, biologically driven unconscious, the remnants of a past now long forgotten through the centuries of evolution and progress. Awe, for Olson, is an experience of repressed, collective memory of our material origins.

I propose a different phenomenology of awe: this experience of nature is not a mere harkening back toward some distant origin long past; rather, the experience of awe before the beauty of the created order is a glimpse into our ontological, not merely biological, origins. It is an intuition into our status as creatures within a cosmos, created by a God who is love. What is more, the experience of awe is not simply an insight into creation as such, as an object of consideration; rather, it is a privileged insight into our relationship with God and creation prior to the phenomenon of the fall. Awe is a glimpse into that preternaturally gifted state in which the relationship between creation and man had not yet been fractured. Indeed, just as couples in their chaste, married love capture a glimpse of the prelapsarian state of innocence among the sexes (as John Paul has suggested in the development of his “theology of the body”) so, too, the experience of awe, that kind of *ecstasis* encountered through the beauty of the created order and its goodness that so often accompanies our encounters with nature, can rightly be understood as an intuition of that prefallen condition in which the alienation between the human person and creation did not exist.¹⁰

For this reason alone, the Church should not be indifferent to preserving that same encounter today. For so many men and women in so many different ways discovering the beauty of the natural order, whether in our national parks or in more local venues, is precisely that first tutor in the faith. It is that place where an awareness, often unthematic, of God, the reality of a divine presence, first imposes itself on one's experience and imagination. As Pieper suggests, "The first wonder one feels forms the first step on the path that leads to the beatific vision, the state of blessedness resulting from reaching the Ultimate Cause. But that human nature is designed for nothing less than such an end, is proved by the ability of the human being to experience the wonder of creation."¹¹

One might begin to appreciate the value of a wildlife sanctuary, not merely as that space that protects a valued species and its habitat, but precisely as that space in which the human person, as a creature whom God has willed for himself, might begin an apprenticeship in his or her sacred vocation. By entering into that moment of receptive contemplation, by affirming the goodness of the species and their respective habitats we prescind from the more typical understanding of dominion over creation as a divinely sanctioned imperative to *do* something, and enter into the prior and deeper activity of *beholding* something. The vocation of dominion over creation, so often understood as a mere *techne*, or mastery over creation, is no less manifest when beholding, in receptive contemplation, the goodness of things, indeed the very goodness of things. By intentionally beholding the goodness of creation, we share in the life of God who beheld all things as very good.

Catholics should not be indifferent to this *preambula fidei* writ-large that is the created order. We ought to be concerned to preserve the experience of the wilderness as a privileged occasion of divine encounter and understand the obligation we have to protect such spaces as precisely rooted in our larger vision of life as more than species inhabiting an environment, but as members of the body of Christ—Christ the Logos of the Creator; Christ the Logos of creation.

The Church's apparent silence on issues of the environment, then, is due in large part not because of a lack of concern for stewardship, or appreciation for the integrity of creatures and the created order, and the like. Rather the absence of any particular doctrinal tradition on environmental concerns as such emerges from the Church's steadfast refusal to understand the human person as a mere creature inhabiting an environment. We occupy a place in an ordered cosmos with a universal plan of redemption, not merely an environment.

Awe before the majesty of creation is less an experience of the environment and more of an invitation to ponder the personal dimension of one's place in existence. Attending to the beauty of nature is to attend the inaugural lecture on self-knowledge.

When I behold the heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars which you set in place—
What is man that you should be mindful of him,
or the son of man that you should care for him? (Ps 8:4)

And so, while it is especially incumbent upon us as Catholics to engage the questions and concerns of our day, it will be of paramount importance that we address them from a proper theological perspective.

Environmental stewardship is at its core neither a mere technical nor practical concern—rather it touches upon the fundamental convictions about the meaning of our place within the universe. No one could accuse Catholicism as being silent on these subjects and Catholics particularly cannot be ignorant of the fundamental doctrinal convictions that ought to frame the question. We ought, as Catholics, bring the full weight of the Church's vision of the human person as created in the Divine image of the Logos to bear. To see the question of stewardship in this light would not only serve to highlight the issues in a more fundamental and adequate manner, but it would open up the treasures of the Church concerning the meaning of man and the creation of the world, treasures that can

only serve to further illuminate the ways in which we might begin to address the problems.

And so while the Church, as such, may not bring a particular scientific expertise to bear upon the challenge, we may nonetheless turn to the Church's tradition for a more fundamental understanding of what is at stake in these issues and begin to develop within our community a conversation that would help all of us more carefully discern what are more or less adequate solutions proposed by the scientific and technical circles.

Principles of Discernment

A sound approach to the questions of stewardship will have to take into consideration an integral vision of the human person, who is the crowning achievement and steward of creation. All roads to a coherent approach to the environment must pass through the dignity of the person and our unique responsibility within the created order to exercise stewardship.

Moreover, such dignity, our faith tells us, is made still more manifest when understood against the fuller context of the person of Christ, the Divine Person who is not only the principle of our redemption, but the Logos of creation. As John Paul so beautifully stated, "Thanks to the Word, the world of creatures appears as a 'cosmos,' an ordered universe."¹² It is Christ, the Logos, who speaks to us through the veil of created beauty, and gives voice to the original call to stewardship. Baptism into that mystery prepares us to enter into that relationship of love first glimpsed through the encounter with nature.

An adequate theology of stewardship, then, will recognize the importance of the life of grace and its nurturance through the sacraments. Grace perfects our natural abilities and properly disposes us to those gifts necessary to become faithful stewards of the earth. The various paths to Christian holiness will include a right order of one's life in regard to created things, as persons within the cre-

ated cosmos, a cosmos initiated in the Logos and redeemed in the Logos made flesh. Charity, the highest of those grace-filled virtues, will supply the necessary norm for the pursuit of a just ordering of goods.

At the same time, an adequate theology of stewardship will have to take into consideration the truth concerning original sin. How original sin contextualizes our relationship within the created order as fallen creatures is one of the more neglected areas in this theological investigation. While there is ample reflection on concupiscence, mortality, self-alienation, and the like, how the doctrine of original sin outlines what is and is not possible regarding stewardship remains underdeveloped. The problem is more extensive than the question of labor and toil, developed in the social teachings of John Paul, though it includes this dimension; it reaches to the depths of our sense of ourselves within a fallen order.

Neglecting a consideration of our fallenness, our alienation from the created order, runs the risk of forgetting that such alienation, which lies at the heart of every human person's encounter with creation, finds its remedy only in the grace of Christ.¹³ In short, there are no environmental practices at the personal or public level that will overcome the alienation of every person as he or she ponders our place in the world. Christ is the answer to the questions of creation, and fidelity to him will be the route to a satisfying stewardship.

Central to so many environmental programs lies a subtle Pelagianism, that is, the notion that one can be saved or all can be made right with the world simply by practicing ever more austere programs of efficiency or simplicity. It was Pelagius in the early part of the fifth century who preached the heretical doctrine of salvation through good will and arduous effort, self-discipline, austerity, rigor, and steadfastness, and it is this same promissory tone one often encounters in contemporary calls for the same. Efficiency and sustainability are important features of the means; they are not ultimate ends, however, and they will not address the spiritual wound within the heart of the fallen human being.

By investing green practices with a kind of significance they simply cannot bear, we place a false confidence in technological achievements. We simply repeat the kind of mistake White identifies in the earlier theological tradition, of investing in *techné* the kind of truth that is only found in *sapientia*, of turning to technology for what can only be found in contemplation.

The challenge of stewardship, then, is to be understood within the more humble context of our filial adoption; we are stewards because we are sons and daughters. The absence of any reference to Christ when considering stewardship places our vocation to care for the earth merely within a secular horizon, as if our destiny is merely to coexist among species within a biological order, as if sustainability bore eternal significance.

And yet, at the same time, because original sin is said to wound but not destroy creation, we have to remember that the original message of creation and the Creator and a lingering experience of integral nature and our place within it remains within the heart of every person. This is what I take to be the phenomenon of awe before nature's splendor, that overwhelming feeling that all is right with the world, that there is an order, and that all is good. Nature, God's first book, becomes that living text in which the mind, heart, and face of God is discerned.

Of course faith cannot remain there, but it can, and so often does, begin there. Thus, the Church ought to be committed, precisely out of a concern for our spiritual well-being, to the notion that we protect access to the beauty of the natural world.

A Convergence of Perspectives

This affirmation that there is an intelligence at work in the mystery of nature, that there is a wisdom to be discovered in the created order, lies deeply within so many who champion an environmental sensitivity. It is only fitting to recognize that the same insight lies in the heart of the Church's vision as well. For what does it mean

for Catholics to “raise environmental awareness” if not the effort to more fully comprehend our place within the intelligible order of creation and our responsibility to live appropriately?

Indeed, to conceive of stewardship as an ever-deepening understanding of our participation in the eternal law does not further remove us from the Catholic theological tradition. In truth, it places us directly in its center, for to consider what it means to participate in the order of creation is precisely the definition of the natural law as promulgated through the centuries of Catholic moral tradition. Natural law, Aquinas argues, is nothing more than the human being’s participation in the eternal law of creation. We can begin to see that developing an awareness of our responsibilities as creatures within a created order, as stewards of the environment, is simply the extension of the natural law ethic toward the responsible stewardship of things.

There is a kind of affinity of outlook, in other words, between a stewardship that recognizes the value and integrity of creatures and their habitats and one which affirms that there is divine wisdom at work in ordering the relationships among them. An appropriate understanding of stewardship would simply entail a deeper reflection upon how we are to participate within this divinely governed, divinely arranged wisdom. In other words, stewardship simply raises this question: how should we participate within the eternal law that is manifest in the intelligibility of the created order?

And yet to ponder how we ought to participate in the eternal law is simply to place before our consciences the natural law, that fundamental order of morality that governs our relationship to creation, creation now understood in an expanded sense, one that includes not merely other creatures, but ourselves (and God) as well.

The tradition of natural law, so ably defended for centuries by Roman Catholic theologians and philosophers, supplies insights into how environmental stewardship ought to be properly conducted. For the natural law tradition would affirm not only the dignity and value of the various creatures and our relationship to them, but it

would begin to outline more completely how human beings are to treat the environment within the context of their just relationships with one another.

More to the point, to retrieve the natural law ethic as the fundamental tradition from which environmental stewardship might be considered is to retrieve all of those moral insights concerning the dignity of the human person and place them within the overall approach to the question of stewardship. The task of Catholic intellectuals, theologians, philosophers, and environmentalists alike will be to articulate more fully how the natural law tradition extends to a consideration of not just other human beings but the created order itself.

Of course, natural law ethics has fallen on hard times in certain intellectual circles, but its traditional defenders might have reason to hope if they see in the widespread emergence of environmental sensitivity simply the rebellion of our collective conscience, the reaction of a culture deprived of the normativity of nature by an intellectual habit of mind that places *techné* over *sapientia* and places human beings in an “environment” as opposed to a “cosmos.” Renewing our confidence in the wisdom of creation, and the moral obligation to live reasonably in accord with creation, will serve to support a notion of stewardship and reinvigorate the moral tradition.

Pope Benedict XVI, as Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, had this to say about the importance of renewing our confidence in the wisdom of creation:

We have to make evident what is meant by the world’s having been created in wisdom. Only then can conscience and norm enter again into proper relationship. For then it will become clear that conscience is not some individualistic (or collective) calculation; rather it is a “con-sciens”, a “knowing along with” creation and, through creation, with God the Creator. Then, too, it will be rediscovered that man’s greatness does not lie in the miserable autonomy of some midget

proclaiming himself his one and only master, but in the fact that his being allows the highest wisdom, truth itself, to shine through. Then it will become clear that man is so much the greater the more he is capable of hearing the profound message of creation, the message of the Creator. And then it will be apparent how harmony with creation, whose wisdom becomes our norm, does not mean a limitation upon our freedom but is rather an expression of our reason and our dignity. Then the body also is given its due honor: it is no longer something "used", but is the temple of authentic human dignity because it is God's handiwork in the world. Then is the equal dignity of man and woman made manifest precisely in the fact that they are different. One will then begin to understand once again that their bodiliness reaches the metaphysical depths and is the basis of a symbolic metaphysics whose denial or neglect does not ennoble man but destroys him.¹⁴

To retrieve the natural law tradition in its robust form would help illuminate in a much more distinctive way the unique Catholic contribution to the conversation. For just as the natural law tradition would underwrite the moral obligations that are incumbent upon us as proper stewards of the created order, so that same tradition would affirm the dignity of the human person especially with regard to the question of life. Environmental policies, then, which would put pressure on communities to regulate their births in a way that is opposed to natural law, for example, would not be an appropriate policy to endorse in light of our more comprehensive Catholic convictions.

This same kind of insight that lies at the heart of both environmental stewardship and the natural law tradition might help further the cause of the formation of Catholic consciences with regard to the more troubling areas of human sexuality.¹⁵ The time may be right for a reconsideration of how the practice of natural family planning is in many ways more fully consistent with the kind of en-

vironmental sensitivity we have been discussing than the more technologically minded solutions proposed by the secular realms. There is an opportunity for the Church to reaffirm the value it places on learning to participate in the natural wisdom of fertility (discerned in the fields and the family, the garden bed and the marriage bed) precisely as one of those facets of an overall stewardship and sensitivity that respects the created order of things and affirms a divine wisdom at work.

Finally, it is important to recall that while living in accordance with the natural law is an inherently noble enterprise, it is not sufficient for the Christian moral life. Our vocation is not merely to live in accordance with the natural law, but to live in accordance with the new law of grace inaugurated with the gospel. All of the natural virtues then that will be required for an adequate environmental stewardship—virtues that would extend both to the respect of life and the integrity of person—will need to have an infused element of grace as fostered in charity and the life of the sacraments. Grace and the life of the sacraments supply the necessary complement for habits we need to develop to become more fully engaged in the kind of stewardship that we are being called on to exercise.

These habits, it should be noted, are particularly exemplified in Mary and upheld in Marian tradition. Such habits therefore are entirely at home within Catholicism and bear a strong Marian character. As preserved from original sin, Mary would have been free from the alienation spoken of above, from that alienation from the natural order that marks *our* everyday passing. Instead, she would have lived in that state of ecstasy, in the presence of that awful grace that you and I encounter only briefly.

She would have contemplated, more fully than any of us, the Logos of creation, spoken by the Father at the foundation of the world. In the exercise of *her* dominion, she would behold, perhaps beneath a star-studded sky, the Logos of the world, the Logos in the flesh, and enter into that perennial prayer of the Church:

When I behold the heavens, the work of your fingers,
 the moon and the stars which you set in place—
 What is man that you should be mindful of him,
 or the son of man that you should care for him? (Ps 8:4)

Notes

1. This essay is adapted from the Ireland Lecture sponsored by the Archbishop John Ireland Library of the Saint Paul Seminary School of Divinity, in Autumn 2007. I am grateful to Dr. Timothy Herrman, Sam Crane, and the Chapelstone Foundation for inspiration and support.
2. There is an extensive consensus among Christians on the importance of the topic. Pope Benedict XVI especially has spoken on the subject with urgency on several occasions, calling for a “moral awakening.” Most notably, perhaps, was his homily to youth gathered in Loreto, Italy, in September 2007 in which he called upon those present “to make courageous decisions that reflect knowing how to re-create a strong alliance between man and the earth.” That same week, he expressed strong support for Bartholomew I, Orthodox Patriarch of Constantinople, on the occasion of the VII Symposium on Religion, Science and the Environment in Greenland.
3. Lynn White Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” *Science* 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1203–12.
4. Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, rev. ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, rpt. 1978).
5. *Ibid.*, 9–17.
6. Sr. Marjorie Keenan, RSHM, *From Stockholm to Johannesburg: An Historical Overview of the Concern for the Holy See for the Environment* (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Vatican, 2002), Preface.
7. Josef Pieper, *Leisure, The Basis of Culture*, intro. Roger Scruton, trans. Gerald Marlberry (South Bend: St. Augustine’s Press, Inc., 1998), 98.
8. *Ibid.*, 94.
9. Sigurd F. Olson, “The Spiritual Need,” in *The Meaning of Wilderness: Essential Articles and Speeches*, ed. David Backes (University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 139.
10. “Uniting with each other (in the conjugal act) so closely as to become ‘one flesh,’ man and woman, rediscover, so to speak, every time and in a special way, the mystery of creation.” John Paul II, “General Audience: November 21, 1979,” in *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan*, foreword by John S. Grabowski (Boston: Daughters of Saint Paul, 1997), 49. What is needed is a further meditation upon how the theology of the body may be extended toward a consideration of things generally. For just as the body is the threshold by which a person becomes a “gift” for another, so, too, the body is the way in which all of creation is received as gift. The body is the threshold by which I express myself and, at the same time,

receive created reality. Stewardship can be seen, then, in terms of a theology of the body in relation to the care of things.

11. Pieper, *Leisure*, 104.
12. John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter: Tertio millennio adveniente* (Vatican, 1994), 8.
13. "Only at the end, when our partial knowledge ceases, when we see God 'face to face,' will we know the ways by which—even through the dramas of evil and sin—God has guided his creation to that definitive sabbath rest for which he created heaven and earth." *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 314.
14. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, "Fundamental Characteristics of the Present Crisis of Faith," *L'Osservatore Romano*, July 24, 1989.
15. For further reflection on the relationships between chastity and stewardship, see Christopher Derrick, *The Delicate Creation: Towards a Theology of the Environment* (Old Greenwich, CT: Deven-Adair, 1972). A more remote vein may be traced in Henry David Thoreau's "Higher Laws," in *Walden* (1854).