Pope Benedict XVI: Environmentalism, Relativism, and Catholic Post-Modernity

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Pope Benedict XVI: Environmentalism, Relativism, and Catholic Post-Modernity

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to shed light on the Catholic response to the environmental crisis by analysing the corpus of works belonging to Joseph Ratzinger, now retired Pope Benedict XVI. This study examines Benedict’s worldview and investigates the influence that his issue with relativism has on his environmental views. To better understand Benedict’s environmental position we must examine his response to other problems in the modern world and realise their interconnection. The hypothesis of this investigation is that, for Benedict, the environmental crisis is a tangible manifestation of a much larger, more intangible problem: relativism.

The four questions that this thesis will answer are: first, how do Catholic social teachings on the environment shape Benedict’s environmentalism? Second, how does his personal, intellectual, and academic worldview influence his issue with relativism? Third, how does relativism affect his environmental position? Fourth, has his unique environmentalism had an influence on the environmental views of U.S. Catholics?

This thesis interprets the numerous academic, theological, and bibliographical works published before and during his election as pope and establishes the institutional context through secondary biographical and historical writings on the subject. The material drawn from Benedict’s writings, over a century of Catholic environmental teaching, and other critical writings all support the finding that Benedict’s anti-relativism influences his environmental views.
The pre-papal investigation follows the progress of Benedict’s issue with relativism and the development of his environmental views, yet the culmination of this analysis materialises in one particular work promulgated during his papacy titled, “If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation” (2010). It argues that, in the absence of absolute truth, not only has morality been relativised, but also human rights and human dignity, which Benedict deems to be universal truths. He always places human dignity at the centre of all social justice issues and believes that the environmental crisis poses a serious threat to human rights. He encourages a “human ecology,” which binds environmental protection to the safeguarding of human dignity.

This message embodies Benedict’s unique environmentalism, as it rejects the relativising of human rights and dignity and requires accountability for the consequences of the environmental crisis. This thesis concludes that Benedict’s anthropocentrism has the strongest influence on his issues with relativism and the environmental crisis and that his environmentalism puts into practice his theoretical objections to relativism.

As a religious leader Benedict is one of the most important thinkers addressing and responding to the environmental crisis. The close analysis of his works illuminates how Catholic thought might be adapted to address this issue; it may also contain insight into how the issue can be re-framed in a way that could break down barriers and promote mutual understanding between religious and non-religious persons.
“Days of Creation” Woodcuts by M. C. Escher

Digital images, courtesy of blogger Silverpiano.
Dedication

I would like to dedicate my thesis to my family for their unconditional love and care as well as my close friends for their positive support.
Acknowledgements

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Chapter I
Introduction

As the leader of the Catholic Church, Pope Benedict XVI chose not to ignore the environmental crisis that grew in depth and complexity toward the end of the 20th century. This thesis will show how Benedict’s response to that crisis is not prejudicial or simplistic or reducible to a sound bite. His ideas reveal a fusion of not only ancient and modern texts, but also of his personal theology and social teaching on the issues of relativism and the environmental crisis. Benedict, like Pope John Paul II, has set a standard for Pope Francis and other religious and non-religious global figureheads, as well as secular leaders around the world.

This thesis will demonstrate that for Benedict, the environmental crisis is just one manifestation of many that add to the “gravest problem of our time:” relativism. In 2005 Benedict remarked, in a homily for the Mass that opened the conclave which elected him as Pope, that the modern world has indiscriminately fashioned itself to the dictatorship of relativism. His perception of the modern world’s struggle with relativism is Benedict’s theological legacy “for the Roman Catholic Church before he exited the public stage” (Allen, The Rise 174). For Benedict, the fundamental problem of our time is the profound  

1. For simplicity and clarity, this thesis will predominantly use the term “environmental crisis,” as it is the term that Benedict uses when discussing the world’s current geo-ecological situation, and it incorporates different environmental aspects, problems, and concerns, which constitute an environmental crisis.
impact that relativism has, not only on religion and morality, but also on the “human ecology” of the modern person, culture, and environment.

Benedict’s response and interpretation to relativism is intertwined with his stance on the environmental crisis, since the environmental crisis is a moral issue, one that must never be relativised because relativism poses a great threat to “human ecology.” Benedict’s form of environmentalism is unique as it stems from his anti-relativistic belief. The environmental crisis will only continue to worsen as relativism prevails as a secular ideology and Benedict’s desire to keep the environment from being relativised is interchangeable with his desire to safeguard human dignity from being relativised. The solution to this dilemma requires the revaluation of relativism and should not be postponed, since the environmental crisis threatens the dignity of present humans, but also the dignity of future generations.

Benedict’s environmental views intersect with his pervading concern with relativism. By wrestling with the environmental crisis, Benedict is simultaneously wrestling with relativism. Benedict believes that relativism has forced a wedge between humans and God. For Benedict, however, creation care must be grounded in faith in a Creator. This separation between humans and God enabled the modern person to not just tolerate, but to legitimise environmental deterioration – just as it has led mankind to tolerate poverty, neglect of the third world, care for the diseased, and so forth. The environmental crisis has been allowed to continue and worsen, in Benedict’s view, due to the overpowering influence of relativism. When nothing is truly wrong or right, few feel inspired or obligated towards the downtrodden – especially when the downtrodden, in this case the environment, is inarticulate and of an entirely different species than we are.
With no common truths, or agreement about what is right and wrong, any dialogue on shared rights is futile. Such total relativism threatens human life since modern scepticism about any and everything, erodes the truth of human rights and the truth of how to live collectively (Weigel, *God’s Choice* 211). In an interview with Peter Seewald, Benedict said that it is “very important not to put seeking approval or accommodating the feelings of the group above the truth. That’s always a big temptation” (Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth* 67). Relativism proposes it has the means to facilitate and fulfil individual wishes as well as the feelings of a group, but Benedict explains that this outlook infringes on the truth, human ecology, and environmental responsibility.

Benedict, while known for his conservative and traditional values, holds views on the environmental crisis that are similar to those held by liberals, with whom he otherwise disagrees. His environmental views do not fit into any “conventional political and ideological categories” (Allen, “Eco-Skeptics” N. pag.), since Benedict upholds an authentic Catholic view regarding the environment. According to Allen, “experts regard Benedict’s strong ecological streak as among the most original of his social teaching” (N. pag.). It comes as no surprise that Benedict’s stance on the environment is accused of flirting with a “movement they regard as an attack on capitalism and limited government, under the guise of hype about global warming” (N. pag.). One question this thesis will engage is whether these interpretations of Benedict’s environmental views are in fact valid, or whether they represent a distortion of his positions. Benedict’s teachings have engendered a variety of responses with the result that environmentalism has become not merely a religious issue, but specifically a Catholic issue.
To demonstrate how Benedict’s concern for the environment is deeply connected to his extensive and considered theology on relativism, the structure of this paper will be chronologically organised and will demonstrate a great deal of continuity in Benedict’s thought. By looking at the documentation of his pre-papacy treatment of relativism, we can discover how it carries over in his thinking on the environmental crisis once he became Pope. This approach substantiates the claim that Benedict’s expressed concerns for the environment are rooted in his works and theology on the relativism of contemporary modern society. The analysis of his works will demonstrate in what way Benedict addresses and defines this crisis and it will give a clearer comprehension of his intellectual worldview.
Chapter II
The Environmental Crisis: Secular, Scholastic, and Religious Responses

The environmental crisis, within the past twenty odd years, has become a part of the modern world’s everyday dialogue. A massive amount of scholarship has discussed religious ideas about environmentalism, including the role of environmental stewardship, the ideological premises of those in favour of environmental activism, and the ideological premises of those who deny the need for environmental activism. Benedict’s writings reveal a powerful and unique perspective on these questions.

The official 2007 International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Summary for Policymakers states that the root cause of the environmental crisis is strongly, if not totally, anthropogenic. Human activity has decreased the resilience of the earth’s atmosphere and it now behaves in unreliable and unpredictable ways (Zabarenko). These environmental changes have damaged the biodiversity of ecosystems and threaten the existence of hundreds of species (Stork). While there are still many sceptics who doubt the validity of the science behind these claims of environmental disaster and destruction, the harsh realities of the environmental crisis have already affected millions of people.

2. “Global atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide have increased markedly as a result of human activities since 1750 and now far exceed pre-industrial values determined from ice cores spanning many thousands of years. The global increases in carbon dioxide concentration are due primarily to fossil fuel use and land use change, while those of methane and nitrous oxide are primarily due to agriculture” (IPCC, Summary for Policymakers 2007).

3. The flooding in Bangladesh provides a vivid example of such environmental devastation. This suffering is known as the “developing country crisis.”
Developing counties are the least responsible for the causes of the environmental crisis, but they continue to suffer the consequences of environmental degradation. While Benedict is concerned about the serious physical damage to the earth, the resource and developmental discrepancies between nations is equally troublesome. A glimpse on the environmental movement in Germany, where Benedict grew up and spent a good deal of his life, and an assessment of the scholarly and academic background on environmental movements will provide a backdrop to Benedict’s environmental stance.

**Germany’s Environmental Movement**

*Time* magazine’s article “Lessons from Germany” by Laura Blue provides an insightful summary of German environmentalism. “Between 1990 and 2005 Germany’s total greenhouse-gas emission declined 18%; in the same period, those of the U.S. went up 16%” (N. pag.). In 2000, the Erneuerbare Energien Gesetz law, also known as the energy “feed-in law,” was passed in Germany. This “feed-in law,” Blue asserts, is the essence of Germany’s eco-program and their environmental advancements are the result of the active role of the German government.

In the last chapter of *Deus Caritas Est*, Benedict seems to support this governmental activism and advocates for progress and development, but with two circumstances: first, for the protection of human dignity and human rights; second, that all progress and development consider first its environmental impact. Also in *Caritas in Veritate* Benedict argues that authentic human development broadens a human’s concept of reasoning (No. 30), which can, in fact, result in environmental care if it is “marked by solidarity and intergenerational justice” (No. 48).
On his Apostolic Journey to Germany in 2011, Benedict addressed the politicians during his visit in Berlin. Benedict touched upon a range of topics, but the most significant was his discussion on the positivist understanding of nature and reason. “A positivist conception of nature as purely functional, as the natural sciences consider it to be, is incapable of producing any bridge to ethics and law” and so can provide only functional answers. The same applies for reason, since what “is not verifiable or falsifiable… does not belong to the realm of reason.” This is a problem for Benedict because if “positivist reason dominates the field to the exclusion of all else” and is the predominant modern-day thinking, “then the classical sources of knowledge for ethics and law are excluded,” which, therefore, harms human dignity (“Listening Heart” 2011).

The positivist understanding in modern-day living “recognizes nothing beyond mere functionality” and equates this mentality to “a concrete bunker with no windows” (“Listening Heart” 2011). This concrete bunker, a metaphor for Benedict’s wariness of purely secular and scientific worldviews, must be reassessed, the “windows must be flung open again” to truly see “the wide world, the sky and the earth once more” and that humanity must learn the correct use of it all (N. pag.). Recalling developments in German political history Benedict acknowledges, while it might not have “flung open the windows:”

the emergence of the ecological movement in German politics since the 1970s… was and continues to be a cry for fresh air which must not be ignored or pushed aside, just because too much of it is seen to be irrational. Young people had come to realize that something is wrong in our relationship with nature, that matter is not just raw material for us to shape at will, but that the earth has a dignity of its own… The importance of ecology is no longer disputed. We must listen to the language of nature and we must answer accordingly. (N. pag.)
Germany’s environmental movement influenced Benedict, yet his environmental views are predominantly anthropocentric and derive from his faith in Catholic tradition as well as his struggle with relativism in the modern world. His treatment of Germany’s environmental movement shows that he admires their efforts, but also that there is much more to do in regards to the ecology of humans. A review of the broader and academic background to the crisis will contextualise other environmental movements and it will introduce the role of religion with regards to the environmental crisis.

Scholarly and Academic Background to Environmental Crisis

In the 1960s, scholars inside and outside of academia became interested in the relationship between religion and the environment. Environmentally concerned religious scholars worked to increase awareness and researched the environmental dimensions of their traditions, and at the same time, some secular scholars argued against religions involvement, wanting to avoid any further relationship between religion and the environment. Lynn White, a prominent environmentalist at the time, wrote an essay “The Historical Roots of the Ecological Crisis,” which blamed Judeo-Christian traditions for the destruction of nature. White claimed that science and technology are “so tinctured with orthodox Christian arrogance toward nature” that no solution for the environmental crisis could possibly be expected from science and technology alone. White concluded, “since the roots of our trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious” (“Historical Roots” 6). Benedict has been a part of an on going,

4. Benedict said, “I would like to underline a point that seems to me to be neglected, today as in the past: there is also an ecology of man” (“Listening Heart” 2011).
multifaceted dialogue responding to White’s challenge by formulating his personal environmental theologies.

Environmental Stewardship

The role and practice of environmental stewardship has gained momentum given the increase of religious environmental awareness, responsibility, and creation care. The term “stewardship” has invoked a variety of reactions, which either support, caution or reject the association of religious environmental responsibility. Like White, some believe that stewardship has been equated to the control of nature, which caused the ecological crisis.

Clare Palmer criticises Christian stewardship, saying that it is blinded to the more fundamental philosophical problems regarding the environmental crisis. She states that stewardship has allowed for the exploitation of the earth and that God’s authority has justified it, and that responsible environmental stewardship “fails to change the fundamental human centredness” (Berry 75). When God as an absentee landlord and humans are the earth’s tenants in charge of the environment, Palmer asserts, God’s presence on earth is mediated through humans only. She argues that stewardship is a theological problem if it simply wishes to bridge the “God/humanity/rest of the natural world relationship” (Berry 68-69). It encourages the attitude that humans represent God in the world, which reinforces the “idea of human metaphysical ‘set-apartness’” (Berry 71). For Palmer, environmental stewardship places humans and nature as equals, which denies the uniqueness of humans within the creation.
Palmer’s analysis of stewardship helps, by contrast, to illustrate Benedict’s environmental views, since everything she argues against is almost everything that Benedict argues for. Benedict unmistakeably advocates for human-centeredness in all situations and supports our metaphysical ‘set-apartness’ within the creation, particularly with development and environmental policymaking. He believes the bond found between God, humans, and God’s creation is essential for environmental responsibility. Denying these theological absolutes has allowed relativism’s total control of modern thinking.

Science, Religion, and the Environmental Crisis

Stephen Jay Gould proposes to solve the “false conflict” between religion and science with his NOMA principle (Non-Overlapping Magisteria). It encapsulates a respectful non-interference, since science is empirical, fact, and theory oriented. Religion deals with morals, values, and the intangible philosophical questions of life. NOMA proposes separate but equal places and roles for science and religion. On the surface it seems ideal, but there are obstacles to a divided approach.

Jeff Schweitzer⁵ questions NOMA’s applicability with the environmental crisis. He argues an effective discourse cannot be exclusively theological or scientific if large demographics of the population are to be persuaded; religious values need to merge with secular political and scientific discourse. In his Huffington Post article, “Climate Change and Christian Values,” he urges for humanity to reconsider their role in environmental destruction and that Christians must reconsider how God intended the earth to be used.

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⁵ Schweitzer, affiliated with the Office of Science and Technology Policy since 1992, worked in the White House for former President Bill Clinton, and was the expert authority on scientific and technological policy analysis for Vice President Al Gore, 1993-2001.
Schweitzer echoes White’s solution for the problem and that we “shall continue to have a worsening ecological crisis unless we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man” (N. pag.).

Retired Harvard professor and respected biologist Edward Osborne Wilson’s book, *The Creation: An Appeal to Save Life on Earth*, states that “[i]f religion and science could be united on the common ground of biological conservation, the problem would be soon solved” (5). Wilson believes this is a moral concept for all beliefs “that we owe ourselves and future generations a beautiful, rich, and healthy environment” (5).

Benedict’s handling of the environmental crisis embraces the merging of science and religion. “Ultimately, science does centre on humankind – but in order to do so, it has to go further and focus on God” (Ratzinger, *Beginning* 86). He accepts the facts presented by environmental scientists and merges them with the long-standing tradition of Catholic social thought as well as his personally developed theology.

An analysis of over a century of encyclicals to discover environmental teachings will introduce Catholic social thought on the environment and provide the backdrop to Benedict’s position on the environmental crisis.
Chapter III

Catholic Environmental Teaching: 1898–1995

While John Paul was the first Pope to explicitly address the environmental crisis, drawing on a long tradition of Catholic social thought dealing with the human condition implicitly shapes Catholic environmental teaching. Since papal encyclicals have an authoritative influence, any Catholic environmental concerns will originate from these works. Benedict’s environmentalism is built on the foundation of over a century of Catholic social teaching on social and economic justice, and justice issues give the foundation to his environmental views.

Catholic social teaching helps to guide Christian behaviour by addressing germane social and human issues. It is the Catholic Church’s duty to examine current social problems and interpret each of them in light of the Gospel (GS No. 4). Pope Paul VI claimed Catholic social teaching provides a unique and universal interpretation of human realities (PP No. 13). The purpose of Catholic social teaching is to carefully reflect the “complex realities of human existence, in society and in the international order, in the light of the faith and of the Church’s tradition” (John Paul SRS No. 41). It is not an alternative economic or socio-political ideology; rather, Catholic social teaching is a moral theology (John Paul CA No. 50; VS No. 99) that runs parallel to economic or socio-political ideologies.

6. Please refer to Appendix I for the complete list of encyclical abbreviations used from here on out.
There is a consensus amongst scholars (Boswell xvi-xvii, 227, 267, 273) that there are fundamental key concepts that derive from Catholic social teachings (Boswell xvi-xvii, 227, 267, 273) and Michael P. Hornsby-Smith condensed these key concepts into six principles -- human dignity; common good; subsidiarity; preferential option for the poor; solidarity, and preferential opinion for non-violence (104). He recommends, since environmental degradation is a growing existential social concern, that these principles can be used as a “criteria for the evaluation of existential social conditions as well as proposed social policies” (13). This thesis discovered the Catholic social teaching for the environment and formulated nine principles for Catholic environmental teaching. The core Catholic environmental teaching is *anthropocentrism*. Protecting human dignity is the axis of their environmentalism, thus promotes the principles of *authentic human development* and *intergenerational responsibility* and rejects *population control* as environmental solutions. These Catholic environmental teachings intermingle with principles of the *equal distribution of resource* and the *qualified endorsement of private property* endorsing environmental sustainability while protecting human dignity. The last concepts promote environmental responsibility, *anti-consumerism*, the *wariness of science and technology*, and *creation care*, and protect human dignity. These nine key fundamental concepts of Catholic environmental teachings reveal the environmental origin to Benedict’s position[s] and concern[s].

**Classic Texts: Pope Leo XII & Pope Pius XI**

At the turn of the nineteenth century, the Catholic Church began to articulate guidelines that addressed social and justice issues. Pope Leo XIII’s 1891 encyclical,
Rerum Novarum, catapulted “modern” encyclicals (Murphy 23) into action when he addressed the issues of capitalism, labour rights, and private property. This encyclical was later coined the “Magna Charta” by Pope Pius XI, because it shapes “Christian activity in the social field” (QA No. 39). While Rerum Novarum does not articulate any specific environmental concern, Leo does introduce Catholic social thinking themes that apply to environmental issues. This encyclical establishes that humans are always at the centre, for humans “among the animal creation [are] endowed with reason” (No. 6), and are “commanded to rule the creatures and … use all the earth and ocean for [their] profit and advantage” (No. 40). While this raises red flags today, Leo’s view of the earth’s resources is merely a reflection of his time of rapid growth in agricultural machinery in the late nineteenth century. Leo’s anthropocentrism reflects Catholic social thought on many issues and Benedict’s environmental thought affirms the superiority of humans.

Leo believes that the earth is God’s gift to all of humanity (No. 8), so Rerum Novarum addresses the issues of private property, since “there is not one [person] who does not sustain life from what the land produces” (No. 8). Leo’s application of a universal and equal human right prepared the groundwork for Benedict’s environmentalism, which stresses the importance of human rights and human dignity through the principle of the common good. While owning private property is a natural human right, the material possession of private property is universal and must be shared “without hesitation when others are in need” (No. 22). The universal sharing of material and environmental possessions to those in need is the principle of the preferential option for the poor.
The state has a role, according to *Rerum Novarum*, to equally protect the public’s well-being as well as “private prosperity” (No. 32). A private employer has a principal duty to act justly and if they do not, it is a “great crime, which cries to the avenging anger of Heaven” (No. 20). Leo argues for the state’s involvement and that the poor should be “specially cared for and protected by the government” (No. 31). The Catholic environmental teachings revealed in this encyclical by Leo are anthropocentrism and equal distribution of resources. The environmental crisis has, and will continue to have, a devastating impact on the developing and poorer nations and Leo’s lessons on the preferential treatment of the poor manifest in Benedict’s environmental concern regarding the impact of environmental degradation.

Pope Pius XI’s *Quadragesimo Anno* was released in 1931 and reiterates many of Leo’s teachings (No. 110). Pius argues that businesses and economic systems that operate by their own will and advantage destroy “the human dignity of the workers, the social character of economic activity and social justice itself, and the common good” (No. 101). These systems must be accountable and have a responsibility that all their decisions and actions promote the common good and protect human dignity. Interestingly, the term “social justice” was first used in *Quadragesimo Anno*, and Pius uses “human rights and human solidarity as the basis of [his] response to the extremes of both totalitarianism and capitalism” (O’Brien and Shannon 41). Pius’s application of “social justice” broadened the scope of justice to the immediacy of human dignity and the larger context of the common good.

The importance of subsidiarity is raised in this encyclical, arguing that the state must let “subordinate groups handle matters and concerns of lesser importance” so that
those in charge can have a system that guarantees *subsidiary* (No. 79–80). Pius believes that this would deter businesses and economic systems from working to their own advantage and safeguards *human dignity* and the *common good*. The Catholic environmental teachings of *anthropocentrism* and the *equal distribution of resources* are reiterated in this encyclical and Benedict reinstates the importance of *subsidiarity* when discussing solutions to the environmental crisis.

**Catholic Social Teaching in Transition: Pope John XXIII**

Around the time that environmental concerns began to take shape, in 1961 Pope John XXIII’s promulgated his encyclical *Mater et Magistra*. John accredits some of the great modern-day achievements but recognises the “pronounced imbalances” that are found between “countries with a different degree of social and economic development” (No. 122). Benedict tackles these imbalances (“World Day of Peace” 2009) and John stresses, on an international level (No. 80), that there is a need to consider the *common good* for “all” people (No. 37). This use of the *common good* is unique, and is not constrained in time, since John encourages the *common good* of “coming generations” (No. 79). *Intergenerational responsibility* is an important Catholic environmental teaching, and secular environmentalists share in this concern too.

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7. According to Lucia Silecchia, Catholic professor of Environmental Law, this was the “earliest encyclical to pinpoint with some precision a host of modern ecological concerns” (“Environmental Ethics” 683).

8. Such as the discovery of atomic energy, the modernisation of agriculture, the increase of communication via radio and television, faster transportation, and the conquest of space (*MM* No. 47).
A significant portion of *Mater et Magistra* focuses on agricultural life. John believes that a farmer’s work is honourable, for they work in “close harmony with Nature - the majestic temple of Creation” (No. 144). John states that a farmer’s life is “rich in allusions of God the Creator and Provider” (No. 144) and this glorification of farmers and the creation offers a spiritual dimension, which justifies for the Catholic environmental teaching of *creation care*.

While environmental concerns were taking shape in the 1960s, the topic of population control was raised. Unsurprisingly, any and all endorsements of population control were rejected in *Mater et Magistra*. John, however, asked whether “economic development and the supply of food [can] keep pace with the continual rise in population,” particularly in poverty-stricken areas (No. 185). Hopeful that advances in science and technology could ensure the long-term and sustainable life for all, John argued that God had “give man the intelligence to discover ways and means of exploiting these resources for his own advantage and his own livelihood” (No. 189). John rejects population control, not only because it goes against moral law and the traditional Catholic social teaching of *anthropocentrism*, but also because he believed that science and technology provide “almost limitless horizons in this matter” (No. 189). Furthermore, John believes that “the resources which God in His goodness and wisdom has implanted in Nature are well-nigh inexhaustible” (No. 189). It is evident that John’s writing embodies this period of time in history. He was hopeful technology and science would close the gap between the continual rise in population and the supply of food.

Overall, John’s encyclical develops Catholic social teaching by reiterating principles, such as, *human dignity*, the *common good*, the *preferential opinion for the*
poor and solidarity. While *Mater et Magistra* does not explicitly discuss the environment, John reiterates Catholic environmental teachings on *anthropocentrism* and the *equal resource distribution* and contributes additional Catholic environmental teachings on *intergenerational responsibility* and *anti-population control*.

In *Values in a Time of Upheaval*, Ratzinger is critical that population control was even a debated subject at “the great conferences on world climate” (154). Today, population control for environmental and human sustainability is a highly debated topic and, along with many other life-issues, remains a very sensitive topic for the Church. Population control is “perhaps the most significant source of tension between the Catholic perspective on environmental matters and the position advanced by many environmentalists who draw a direct link between environmental problems and population growth” (Silecchia, “Environmental Ethics” 684). Catholic environmental teaching rejects population control as a solution to the crisis based on the fact that humans were created in God’s image, which is the reason for their *anthropocentric* handling of many life issues. In 2006, Benedict criticised the “great conference on world climate” (*Values* 154) for their discussion on population control and sustainability.

Only months before John’s death in 1963, *Pacem in Terris* was promulgated. John provides some new considerations on social justice and the environment. *Pacem in Terris* reaffirms the pre-eminence of humans in the creation, since God gifted humans with “intelligence and freedom, and made him lord of creation” (No. 3). Both science and technology illustrate God’s infinite greatness, since God “created all things out of nothing, pouring into them the abundance of his wisdom and goodness” (No. 3). *Pacem in Terris* was the first encyclical to be addressed to “All Men of Good Will.” Such
Inclusiveness is significant because John’s message, and intended audience, is no longer restricted to Christians, but is open to all persons of good will. This approach is important, since the encyclical is concerned with universal matters like *human dignity* and the *common good*. When addressing “a problem of such universal scope as the environment” (Murphy 122), John’s inclusive approach is significant since it promotes the attitude of a shared responsibility for both Christians and non-Christians. Catholic environmental teachings always implement a similar universal inclusiveness. In Benedict’s 2008 message to the FAO he argued for the right to access land as to guarantee the identity of indigenous people, illustrating his universality of human dignity.

In addition to this universal appeal, John desires a global distribution of resources. He claims that it should be made illegal if a state’s development “brings harm to other states and unjustly oppresses them” (No. 92). This is a prevalent concern for Catholic environmental teaching, particularly given the growing resource discrepancies found between developing and developed nations (Benedict “Fighting Poverty” 2009). Environmentalists have coined this as a “North versus South” issue (Roberts) and *Pacem in Terris* establishes Catholic environmental teaching on the *equal distribution of resources* regarding developmental discrepancies. While the *equal distribution of resources* surfaced in prior encyclicals, John’s treatment of the growing resource imbalance found between developed and developing nations firmly established the *equal distribution of resources* as a Catholic environmental teaching. The *equal distribution of resources* is reiterated through Benedict’s environmental dialogue on the imbalances found between developing and developed nations (“Director General of FAO” 2006).

A final contribution that John makes frames Benedict’s environmental stance,
through *Pacem in Terris* appeal for nuclear disarmament. “[E]ven though the monstrous power of modern weapons act as a deterrent, there is nevertheless reason to fear that the mere continuance of nuclear tests, undertaken with war in mind, can seriously jeopardize various kinds of life on earth” (No. 111). The dangers of nuclear weapons not only threaten human life but all life on earth, which demonstrates that John takes a threat to the environment seriously.

The threat of nuclear war is also very serious for Benedict -- “In a nuclear war, there would be no victors, only victims” (“In Truth” 2006). But, according to Benedict, war does not have to be nuclear to be a threat to the environment. Benedict asserts that the continued path of environmental degradation will trigger an increase in conflict over energy resources (No. 9). The environmental crisis ultimately will spark wars over the basic ability to access, and even availability of, food and water (No. 6). This link is one of Benedict’s unique environmental views, coined as the “ecology of peace” (“Human Family” 2007 No. 8).

Second Vatican Council: Pope Paul VI

In 1965 the Second Vatican Council issued *Gaudium et Spes*, a Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.9 *Gaudium et Spes* reiterates the bond between God and the earth (No. 2), the centrality of humans in the creation (No. 12), and that humans share “the light of the divine mind” (No. 15), establishing the Catholic environmental teaching of *anthropocentrism*. *Gaudium et Spes* repeats that God intended

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9. Sister Marjorie Keenan is vocal about the pertinent role of the Church with the environmental crisis. According to Keenan, *Gaudium et Spes* “documents the solid roots of a formal and informal teaching concerning care for the environment” (*Stockholm to Johannesburg* 9).
the earth for everyone (No. 69) and further develops John XXIII’s *intergenerational responsibility* stating: humans must “look out for the future and establish a proper balance between the needs of present-day consumption, both individual and collective, and the necessity of distributing good on behalf of the coming generations” (No. 70). *Gaudium et Spes* establishes that earthly goods are not only for present-day needs, but for the needs of future generations, which requires an *equal distribution of resources* for the present and future. This document rejects *population control* and the belief “population growth [must] be radically reduced everywhere” (No. 87). Governments should never enforce *population control* for “it is highly important that everyone be given the opportunity to practice upright and truly human responsibility” (No. 87). Governments must not implement population control, as it denies human rights and infringes on the right to personal responsibility.

According to *Gaudium et Spes*, when people do not recognise God as the beginning, they lose sight of their ultimate goal and squander “harmony with [themselves], with others, and with all created things” (No. 13). Interconnectedness with God, humans and nature is vital, since “without the Creator the creature would disappear” (No. 36) and “[w]hen God is forgotten, however, the creature itself grows unintelligible” (No. 36). This holistic attitude toward God, humans and the environment mirrors the unique components of Catholic environmental teachings. This document acknowledged that “believers of whatever religion always hear [God’s] revealing voice in the discourse of creatures” (No. 36) and experience God within the creation (No. 75). Through the accumulated moral weight of these authoritative Catholic documents, Catholic environmental teaching is now more evident and tangible.
Since each encyclical is successively in dialogue with prior encyclicals, the theme of Catholic environmental teachings starts to emerge and Pope Paul VI’s encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (1967) echoes some of these concepts. Much like his predecessors, Paul believed that the creation is intended for humans to responsibly use and develop “by intelligent effort” (No. 22). This *anthropocentrism* reaffirms Catholic environmental teaching and the indisputable supremacy of humans. Paul revisits the conversation with private property and states that, “according to the traditional doctrine as found in the Fathers of the Church and the great theologians, the right to property must be exercised to the detriment of the common good” (No. 23). Although the *common good* is referred to within the framework of private property, the *common good* need not be limited by it. The classification of private property can be interpreted symbolically and apply to other entities like states, governments, businesses and corporations.

Paul presents a clear and rational argument when it comes to the responsibility for future generations. Since humanity inevitably benefits from the progress of previous generations and will continue to profit from their modern works, then all humans “have obligations towards all, and [humans] cannot refuse to interest [themselves] in those who will come after” (No. 17). This promotes an *intergenerational solidarity* of people today and tomorrow and protects the *common good* and *human dignity* of present and future generations. Paul’s approach to development has a strong influence on Catholic environmental teaching (CA No. 37-40) and is a main feature in Benedict’s future encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*. It is Paul’s emphasis on both economic and human development that influenced Benedict’s environmental teachings in *Caritas in Veritate*. For Paul, development must be integral to human growth, not just to economic growth. It
must “promote the good of every man and of the whole man” (No. 14). *Populorum Progressio* reaffirms Catholic environmental teachings of *anti-population control* (No. 37) and the *equal distribution of resources*, which Paul calls the “common development of mankind” (No. 43, 45). *Populorum Progressio* solidified the environmental value and role for an *authentic human development*, by the codes of human dignity, the common good, the preferential opinion of the poor and, solidarity.

In the 1970s public awareness and environmental concerns flourished, resulting in a range of environmental movements. In 1971 Paul’s Apostolic Letter, *Octogesima Adveniens*, was published and like his last encyclical, it addressed issues that shape Catholic environmental teachings. Sister Keenan, claims, however, that the “tone of *Octogesima Adveniens* is decidedly more urgent” when it comes to environmental issues (*Stockholm to Johannesburg* 16). In *Octogesima Adveniens*, Paul resumes his previous reflections on technology and development and asks, “[h]aving rationally endeavoured to control nature, [are people] not now becoming the slave of the objects which [they] makes” (No. 9)? Paul circles back to this question when addressing “the dramatic and unexpected consequence of human activity” (No. 21). According to Paul, environmental awareness has increased since people are beginning to realise that the exploitation and destruction of nature means, in turn, that humans are, or will be, victims to their role in environmental exploitation and degradation (No. 21). *Octogesima Adveniens*’s explains that environmental destruction upsets the human framework and will result in an insupportable environment for the future. This argument concludes that Christians have a responsibility to protect the destiny shared by all, and that environmental degradation is a “wide-ranging social problem that concerns the entire human family” (No. 21).
Octogesima Adveniens confirms the need for environmental responsibility that establishes Catholic environmental teaching.

Post-Conciliar: Pope John Paul II

John Paul was the first Pope to explicitly confront the threat of the environmental crisis and is known for his environmental concerns.\(^{10}\) John Paul provides guidance on environmental issues in his encyclicals and other teachings.\(^{11}\) Redemptor Hominis was released in 1978 and addresses his environmental concerns, amongst many other issues.

Increasingly aware of environmental degradation, John Paul strongly cautions against the “pollution of the natural environment in areas of industrialization” (No. 8). His environmental concerns are reiterated in Redemptor Hominis when examining the stark consequences of environmental degradation. John Paul believes people are increasingly aware that the environmental crisis “demands rational and honest planning” (No. 15). He explained that the “uncontrolled development of technology” ignored authentic long-term humanistic development (No. 15). Uncontrolled technological advances threaten the environment, which alienates and ultimately further separates humans from nature. In effect, people “seem to see no other meaning in [their] natural environment than what serves for immediate use and consumption” (No. 15). John Paul vividly addresses environmental problems and provides Catholic environmental teachings

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10. An example that fosters John Paul’s environmental concern and involvement is in 1979, John Paul proclaimed St. Francis of Assisi as the Patron Saint of ecology (Inter Sanctos).

11. “More so than any of his predecessors, John Paul has offered extensive commentary on environmental matters” (Silecchia, “Environmental Ethics” 691).
on these problems. He urges people to abandon the role of “exploiter” and “destroyer” and to become more like the “master” and the “guardian” of the creation (No. 15).

John Paul speaks against consumerism in “highly developed societies” given to the lopsided consequence that it has on lower-consuming societies, “suffering from hunger … dying each day of starvation and malnutrition” (No. 16). Uncontrolled consumerism is an abuse of freedoms in one country as it limits the exact same freedoms in other countries. Consumerism and the abuse of freedoms forces “those suffering marked shortages [to be] driven to conditions of even worse misery and destitution” (No. 16). *Redemptor Hominis* reiterates the Catholic environmental teachings of *anthropocentrism* and the *equal distribution of resources* and contributes to Catholic environmental teaching on *anti-consumerism*. John Paul shelters *anti-consumerism* under the umbrella of *equal distribution of resources*, supported by John XXIII’s “perceived imbalances” (*MM* No. 122) and Paul VI’s “common development of mankind” (*PP* No. 43–45).

In 1981 John Paul promulgated *Laborem Exercens*, to mark the ninetieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*. *Laborem Exercens* makes a strong connection between the longstanding Catholic concerns with workers’ rights with the emerging concern for the environment. John Paul wrestles with labour and work related issues, yet unlike Leo XIII (No. 40), John Paul’s address on workers’ conditions demands attention to the “realization that the heritage of nature is limited and that it is being intolerably polluted” (No. 1). This perception of the earth’s resources contrasts that of earlier encyclicals that
believed in the creation’s unlimited ability to provide of natural resources.\textsuperscript{12} This shift in attitude towards the earth’s resources distinguishes John Paul from his predecessors’ and their perception of the creation. John Paul states that the earth’s resources are finite, especially if they are recklessly consumed and the environment continually polluted. This articulates the new Catholic environmental teaching of \textit{creation care}.

John Paul’s 1987 encyclical, \textit{Sollicitudo Rei Socialis} covers significant ground by illuminating the necessities for \textit{solidarity} and John Paul argues that solidarity is undeniably a Christian virtue (No. 38–40). The importance of \textit{solidarity} is re-examined when discussing \textit{Populorum Progressio}’s “authentic development” and John Paul provides supplemental writings on development with regards to the failures of consumerist societies in the modern world (No. 28).\textsuperscript{13}

After assessing the negative side of development, \textit{Sollicitudo Rei Socialis} highlights the positive aspects. People now are developing an awareness “of their own dignity and that of every human being”, and the U.N.’s \textit{Declaration of Human Rights} has gained “acceptance by the international community” (No. 26). Since people are aware that natural resources are limited, they must respect the “integrity and the cycles of nature and to take [nature] into account when planning for development” (No. 26). It is clear that development is complex and John Paul asserts that it must consider all the consequences, which includes its environment impact. Benedict echoed this point in his

\textsuperscript{12} Silecchia claims that they “rejoiced in a nearly unbounded fecundity of nature” (“Environmental Ethics” 693).

\textsuperscript{13} “On the contrary, the experience of recent years shows that unless all the considerable body of resources and potential at man’s disposal is guided by a moral understanding and by an orientation towards the true good of the human race, it easily turns against man to oppress him” (\textit{PP} No. 28).
2009 Peace Statement (No.2).

_Sollicitudo Rei Socialis_ advocates for “authentic human development” as it considers the moral character of development for both humans and the environment (No. 27–34). Authentic human development must respect the “cosmos” — the beings which constitute the natural world (No. 34). John Paul offers three ways in which this can be achieved. First, people must not “use with impunity the different categories of beings, whether living or inanimate,” they must consider “the nature of each being and … its mutual connection in an ordered system, which is precisely the cosmos” (No. 43).

Second, people cannot behave with absolute dominion like nature is inexhaustible, since natural resources are in fact limited and non-renewable. Such behaviour threatens present and future generations. Third, industrialised countries must address how their development threatens the quality of everyone’s life since industrialisation pollutes the environment and has serious consequences for human health. “It is evident that development, the planning which governs it, and the way in which resources are used must include respect for moral demands. One of the latter undoubtedly imposes limits on the use of the natural world” (No. 43). These points link _authentic human development_ with environmental awareness, concern, protection, and care.

John Paul believed that when people disobey and do not submit to God’s rule, nature will rebel because they have “tarnished [their] divine image” (No. 30). The protection of the environment and all of its inhabitants, living or inanimate, depends on humanity’s relationship with God. _Sollicitudo Rei Socialis_ sets Catholic environmental
thought within the environmental movement\textsuperscript{14} and confirms Catholic environmental teachings of anthropocentrism, intergenerational responsibility, the equal distribution of resources, and anti-consumerism. John Paul delivers the Catholic environmental teaching of authentic human development, which was developed in response to Paul VI’s “authentic development” in Populorum Progressio. Since Paul VI believed that the equal distribution of resources went hand in hand with the “common development of all” humankind (No. 43) it further supports Catholic environmental teaching on authentic human development. John Paul’s environmentalism placed the Church’s role at the heart of the crisis. Since Benedict’s environmental views derive from the foundation of over a century of Catholic social teaching, it is clear that Benedict’s environmental position reflects the Catholic environmental teachings established in this encyclical.

John Paul’s most celebrated environmental writing was his 1990 Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace, titled “Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all of Creation.” This Peace Statement is essential to Catholic environmental teaching, as it is the first official Catholic writing to exclusively address the environmental crisis. It bluntly confronts the crisis and establishes it as a moral dilemma for humanity worldwide. John Paul sees the lack of respect for the environment and the pillaging of natural resources (No. 1) as a threat to all humankind, arguing that ecological awareness must be encouraged, not downplayed. John Paul argues that the moral responsibility to care for the creation offers a common ground for all people (No. 2), but for Christian’s in particular if people are “not at peace with God, then earth itself cannot be at peace” (No. \textsuperscript{14}).

\textsuperscript{14} Drew Christiansen argues in Moral Theology that Sollicitudo Rei Socialis is a “landmark in Catholic participation in the environmental movement” (254) and that John Paul took “very long and rapid steps to bring Catholics into the march of environmental ethics” (256).
5). This Peace Statement provides a practical understanding of the environmental crisis facing the modern world.

The environmental crisis raises two fundamental moral issues, according to John Paul. The first is the indiscriminate advances in technology and science (No. 6) and the second is the lack of respect for life (No. 7). These moral issues are extremely important to Benedict as he develops them in his encyclicals and in his Messages over the years on World Day of Peace and World Food Day. While science and technology have benefited humanity, John Paul argues that these advances have also caused permanent damage to both the creation and humanity. The threat to the environment is bound to the threat of humanity -- “we cannot interfere in one area of the ecosystem without paying due attention both to the consequences of such interference in other areas and to the well-being of future generations” (No. 6). Certain environmental damages cannot be reversed, however, others can be stopped if “the entire human community – individuals, states and international bodies – take seriously the responsibility that is theirs” (No.6). John Paul believes that by joining forces it will “demonstrate the nobility of the human vocation to participate responsibly in God’s creative action in the world” (No. 6). Benedict agrees with this argument, however, he is wary because he believes that the influence of relativism has caused the modern person to not agree upon, let alone accept, an objective, communal or shared vocation for environmental responsibility.

15. “The gradual depletion of the ozone layer and the related ‘greenhouse effect’ has now reached crisis proportions as a consequence of industrial growth, massive urban concentrations and vastly increased energy needs. Industrial waste, the burning of fossil fuels, unrestricted deforestation, the use of certain types of herbicides, coolants and propellants: all of these are known to harm the atmosphere and environment. The resulting meteorological and atmospheric changes range from damage to health to the possible future submersion of low-lying lands” (No. 6).
The second moral issue is the lack of respect for life -- “[r]espect for life, and above all for the dignity of the human person, is the ultimate guiding norm for any sound economic, industrial or scientific progress” (No. 7). In this section, John Paul states that this issue is the “most profound and serious indication of the moral implications underlying the ecological problem” (No. 7). Production interests have trumped all concerns for human dignity and that economic interests prevail over the good of individuals, even societies. Such “genuine contempt for” humanity has permitted the continued destruction and pollution of the environment, and John Paul states that these imbalances negatively affect humans and the environment. The moral problems with technology and science and the lack of respect for life, merge together when John Paul discusses biological research. He is vigilant of the unknown “biological disturbances that could result from indiscriminate genetic manipulation” (No. 7). Furthermore, “no peaceful society can afford to neglect either respect for life or the fact that there is an integrity to creation”, they are one in the same (No. 7). Respect for life, according to John Paul, defends the creation and supports the integrity of humanity.

In search of a solution for the environmental crisis, this Peace Statement proposes a new practice of solidarity (No. 10). Since John Paul already established the environmental crisis as a moral problem, the need for a new solidarity must also be morally propelled. This logic is particularly true when addressing the relations between developing and developed countries. John Paul argues that developed (richer) nations must not ask developing (poorer) nations to employ restrictive environmental policies if the developed nations have not done so themselves. In turn, developing nations are not “morally free to… recklessly continue to damage the environment through pollutants,
radical deforestation and unlimited exploration of non-renewable resources” (No. 10). This teetering predicament, the discrepancy between nations, is exactly where John Paul wishes to implement the new practice of *solidarity*. World leaders must accept this new *solidarity* in order to strengthen “cooperative and peaceful relations” between all nations (No. 10). The environmental crisis is the “*responsibility of everyone*” (No. 15) and “all members of society, have a precise role to play” (No. 13). At the end of his *Peace Statement*, John Paul concludes by reminding Catholics “of their serious obligation to care for all of creation” (No. 16) and that caring for the environment is a rudimentary worldview and practice for all Christians. Caring for the creation stems from the staple Christian belief in God as the Creator and that environmental care praises God as the Creator. “Respect for life and for the dignity of the human person extends also to the rest of creation, which is called to join man in praising God” (No. 16).

Ultimately the environmental crisis cannot be resolved, according to John Paul, until modern society “takes a serious look at its lifestyle” (No. 13). This change in lifestyle requires limiting consumerism and curbing instant gratification, since many parts of the world are indifferent to the damages caused by their instant gratification and consumerism. Such ignorance permits a lack of respect for human life and leads to a lack of respect for the environment. John Paul advocates, in the spirit of sacrifice, that simplicity, discipline, and moderation “must become a part of everyday life, lest all suffer the negative consequences of the careless habits of a few” (No. 13). This *Peace Statement* highlights the established Catholic environmental teachings of *anthropocentrism*, *anti-consumerism*, *intergenerational responsibility* (No. 15), *authentic human development*, and the *equal distribution of resources*. John Paul contributes a supplementary Catholic
environmental teaching -- *wariness of technology and science*.

John Paul promulgated *Centesimus Annus* in 1991 to mark the centennial of *Rerum Novarum*. This encyclical explores Leo XIII’s writings by looking back “in order to discover anew the richness of the fundamental principles” (No. 3). It reviews Catholic environmental teachings such as, *intergenerational responsibility* (No. 37) and the *qualified endorsement of private property* (No. 30). John Paul’s protection of *intergenerational responsibility*, however, is profoundly connected with his ecological concerns. Like John Paul’s last encyclical, *Centesimus Annus* reaffirms that *authentic human development* (No. 13, 39 & 41) and *intergenerational responsibility* are tightly bound to environmental care (No. 27–34). John Paul explicitly confronts the moral failings of the environmental crisis in *Centesimus*,\(^\text{16}\) which solidified the ecological issues as being particularly troublesome for John Paul. His 1990 *Peace Statement* associated the environmental crisis with issues of consumerism. Humans have, in excess and disorder, consumed not only earth’s resources, life’s resources. “At the root of the senseless destruction of the natural environment lies an anthropological error” (No. 37). This anthropological error is humankind’s misguided separation from God, the Creator.\(^\text{17}\)

While people are preoccupied with the preservation of the natural environment and correctly recognise the urgent need for balance and must accept the gift of God’s grace as expressed in the creation, “too little effort is made to safeguard the moral conditions for an authentic ‘human ecology’” (No. 38). The term “human ecology” reflects a uniquely Catholic environmental perspective. Thus far, all of the encyclicals

\(^{16}\) See Silecchia “Environmental Ethics” 704.

\(^{17}\) See No. 37 for the entire quote.
have reserved the pre-eminence of humans within the world and, in light of the
environmental crisis -- Centesimus Annus takes this human pre-eminence one step further
and combines environmental preservation with human preservation. Silecchia explains,
for the Church the natural environment and humans are so inseparable that “concern for
one may not rightfully exclude concern for the other” (“Environmental Ethics” 706).
John Paul argues that God’s gift to humans is not just the creation, but “man too is God’s
gift to man” (No. 38). This view spearheads most Catholic environmental teachings.

Despite Centesimus Annus theological approach to environmental issues, John
Paul expands on the practical and environmental concerns mentioned in his Peace
Statement. This encyclical covers establishes Catholic environmental teachings on:

- anthropocentrism, anti-consumerism (No. 36–37, 41 & 57), wariness of technology and
  science, the qualified endorsement of private property (No. 6–7, 10 & 30),
- intergenerational responsibility (No. 37 & 49), and authentic human development. John
  Paul’s writings on the environment solidified the need and usefulness of Catholic
  environmental teaching.

Drawing from Saint Gregory of Nyssa’s work John Paul states, since humans
are created in God’s likeness, and since “truth” enlightens human intelligence and
freedom, then human nature originates “both in dignity and in name” (No. 38). This
supports the pre-eminence of humans within the creation and establishes the primacy of
human dignity within the creation. For John Paul, human dignity is as innate as the
supremacy of humans within God’s creation. The pre-eminence of humans encompasses
human dignity and John Paul believes that they are one in the same. Anthropocentrism is

18. De Hominis Opifico. Chapter IV titled, “That the construction of man
throughout signifies his ruling power.”
a fundamental Catholic environmental teaching and John Paul has situated *human dignity* as equally binding to the Catholic environmental teachings of *anthropocentrism*.

The environmental teachings in Benedict’s encyclicals confront the environmental crisis like a life issues and promotes life-protecting practices like, *intergenerational responsibility* and *authentic human development*. According to John Paul, the future of humankind and the dignity of people today are highly susceptible to the environmental crisis due to global resource disparity, continued degradation of nature, and the limit and non-renewability of natural resources. John Paul’s 1995 *Evangelium Vitae* provides complementary Catholic social teachings that can also be applied to Catholic environmental teachings, and the problem with population control is tackled again in this encyclical. As depicted in *Mater et Magistra*, population control is rejected as either a solution or a practice (No. 185–189) and *Evangelium Vitae* continues to caution against, as John Paul coined it, “anti-birth” policies. John Paul believes that such policies are being endorsed in highly populated, poor, developing countries (No. 16). *Evangelium Vitae*, according to Silecchia, “is devoted to explaining why population control, as traditionally understood, represents a morally impermissible answer to environmental problems” (“Environmental Ethics” 708).

John Paul circles back to the issue of population control when he discusses the discrepancies that are found between developed and developing counties. Human life reflects the glory of God and they “have been given a sublime dignity, based on the intimate bond which … shines forth a reflection of God” (No. 34). Given the pre-eminence of humans in the creation and human dignity, population control, according to John Paul, defies the essence of being human: deflecting, not reflecting, the glory of God.
Instead of population control as a solution to the environmental crisis, John Paul suggests the shared responsibility of, and for, all humans. *Evangelium Vitae* draws from Christian scripture and argues that the Bible provides a sound ethical direction, which always respects and protects human life. John Paul argues, that people have a shared responsibility “towards the creation which God has put at the service of his personal dignity, of his life, not only for the present but also for future generations” (No. 42).

John Paul suggests a modern-day cultural change and proposes for a new lifestyle that requires that all choices be practically considered by the individual on a personal, social, and global level. John Paul strongly endorses the Golden Rule (cf. Mt 7:12), but extends it to also mean that any and all personal choices made must always be socially and globally responsible. *Evangelium Vitae* supports this view and advocates that every person be supported and “loved for their own sakes… for a new culture of life no one must feel excluded: everyone has an important role to play” (No. 98). This lifestyle change must reprioritise the *person over things* and *being over having* -- it “involves a passing from indifference to concern for others, from rejection to acceptance” (No. 98). John Paul hopes a lifestyle change will improve the human condition and developed nations, that unjustly hoard natural resources, will rethink their environmental priorities.

It is evident that the environmental crisis poses as a threat to humanity; however, the solution must never be population control, since it only harms the human condition and deprives a human’s right to freedom and life. Population control, according to John Paul, originates from the selfish concerns of those who unjustly control and hoard the earth’s natural resources. This firm position on population control and anti-birth control policies presents a paradoxical issue. While, the Vatican encourages Catholics to have
families, they must only do so within their financial means and must consider the environmental impact of the size of their family (Kissling).

Before *Evangelium Vitae*’s discussion on population control the Catholic social teachings of *anthropocentrism* starkly contrasts many environmental movements that often parallel nature with the environment as being equal to humans (cf. Lovelock *Vanishing Face*; Ruether *Gaia & God*). *Evangelium Vitae* solidifies anti-*population control* as an important Catholic environmental teaching and sanctions the Catholic environmental teachings of *anthropocentrism, anti-consumerism, intergenerational responsibility, wariness of technology and science, the qualified endorsement of private property*, and *authentic human development*.

This comprehensive analysis of encyclicals over the past century distinctively outlines the development of Catholic environmental teaching and highlights its social and theological dimensions. As demonstrated in this section, Catholic environmental teachings continue to evolve and develop and are not restricted to encyclicals. Essentially, they provide the rudimentary Catholic environmental teachings of *anthropocentrism, anti-consumerism, anti-population control, intergenerational responsibility, equal distribution of resources, wariness of technology and science, qualified endorsement of private property* and lastly, *authentic human development*. These environmental teachings provide a purely Catholic social teaching background to Benedict’s environmental views. In order to understand how and why Benedict’s views are the way that they are, we must first look at his personal, academic, and literary development. This will determine what influences have had the most significant impact
and therefore shaped his views on modern-day concerns, including the environment and relativism in the modern world.
Chapter IV
Who is Pope Benedict XVI?

Benedict’s background and intellectual worldview strongly influenced his struggle with relativism and the modern world’s acceptance of relativism. The influence of his Catholic family, his experience of the Nazi regime, the rise of Marxism, the politicising of Jesus and salvation and the Church’s “missed opportunities in 1968 and 1989,” are collectively the pieces which contributed to Benedict’s anti-relativism. This section discusses the issue of relativism and introduces Benedict’s sensitivity towards nature and the environment, which are strongly tied to his faith, the liturgy, and his interest in the natural sciences.

Childhood to Adolescence: The Influence of the Nazi Regime

Joseph Aloisius Ratzinger – Pope Benedict XVI – was born on April 16\textsuperscript{th}, 1927 at Marktl am Inn in Bavaria, Germany and is the youngest of his siblings, George and Maria. His father, Joseph Ratzinger Sr., was a police officer and his mother, Maria Ratzinger Sr., was a devout mother of three. When the Social Nationalists came to power in 1933, it was clear that significant changes were brewing and as a police officer, Ratzinger Sr. was acutely aware of these changes. Ratzinger Sr. had been in “a number of __________________________

19. This section of the thesis will use: the official Vatican biography; two of John Allen Jr.’s biographies, *Cardinal Ratzinger* (2000), and *The Rise of Pope Benedict XVI* (2005); a documentary, “Pope Benedict XVI: A Profile on the Life of Joseph Ratzinger,” by Nick Goryachkin made by the Blagovest Media studios; and a handful of articles, to provide a closer insight on Ratzinger’s personal, academic, intellectual, and theological background.
conflicts with his authorities” (qtd. Josef Huber in Goryachkin N. pag.) and his “criticisms of the Nazis made life” (Weigel, “The Making” 2) very difficult. He discreetly avoided conflict by frequently moving his family over the first ten years of Joseph’s life, since the Ratzinger family were by no means, “pro-Nazi” (Allen, *The Rise* 146). Josef Huber, the mayor of Aschau Germany, commented on this transition period for the Ratzingers and explained how Ratzinger Sr. did not want to serve the Nazis, and refused “to be a part of the machine driven by the Nazis” (Goryachkin N. pag.). In 1937, Ratzinger Sr. retired and the family settled in a village close to the Austrian border, Traunstein Hufschlag. It is in Traunstein that Ratzinger received his “Christian, cultural and human formation” (Biography, Online Vatican N. Pag.). There is no question that living in Germany was difficult during such a trying period, especially for Ratzinger since the Nazi regime “coincided with the formative period of his life” (Allen, *The Rise* 146).

Ratzinger’s early life was not easy. The Nazi regime was imposing totalitarian control and was hostile towards the Catholic Church (Weigel, *God’s Choice* 157-161). Once, Ratzinger witnessed Nazi’s beat-up the local parish priest before Mass. Ratzinger “carried two indelible memories from the next four years: the brownshirts spying on the local priests and informing on these ‘enemies of the Reich’; and the mortification of his father, who was, at least formally, working ‘for a government whose representatives he considered to be criminals’” (qtd. in Weigel, *God’s Choice* 160). Ratzinger explained later that “only a form of Christianity clear about its core beliefs, and equally clear about its system of authority, will have the inner strength to stand up against alien forces attempting to seduce or hijack it” (Allen, *The Rise* 149).
Ratzinger’s early experience with Nazism began to shape his views on relativism. The Nazi regime corrupted people’s core religious beliefs, it questioned the authority or their faith and muddied absolute truths that were once clear and grounded in their faith. Nazism’s totalitarian authoritative control and enforcement of the regime’s absolutism resulted in the scepticism of post-war Western society’s regarding imposed authority and absolute truth. While these alien forces were the Nazi regime, they still exist for Ratzinger, “especially in form of rampant materialism and relativism in the West” (Allen, *The Rise* 149). Ratzinger’s struggle with relativism is a “characteristic struggle of his papacy” (Allen, *The Rise* 145), influenced by his problems with Nazism (Ratzinger, *Beginning* 43).

At the age of 14, in 1941, Ratzinger was conscripted into the Hitler Youth as was required by law and strictly reinforced (Evans 272). Also that year, Ratzinger’s 14-year-old cousin with Down syndrome was forcefully taken for “therapy” through the Action T-4 Campaign for Nazi eugenics (Allen, “Anti-Nazi” 2005). Months later his family received notification of his cousins “natural death.” Ratzinger publically shared this personal detail in 1996 at a Vatican Conference with the Pontifical Council for Health Care. It is evident, though it was only revealed fifty-five years later, that this weighed heavily on Ratzinger. Once drafted in the Hitler Youth, his brother George claims that Ratzinger was an unenthusiastic member and refused to attend all meetings (Allen, *The Rise* 147; Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth*). His brother George explained in Goryachkin’s documentary that the Nazi regime had a faith detesting view of the world:

This faith detesting attitude in turn, led to the forming of a lifestyle that we could accept in no way. My brother, friends and I directed all of our lives following the Ten Commandments and worshipping Christ… We
hoped for a new world, free of hatred, malice and oppression. (Goryachkin N. pag.)

Ratzinger agrees with his brother George, but also accredits his early studies in Greek, Latin, literature, and history, claiming that it “created a mental attitude that resisted seduction by a totalitarian ideology” (Milestones 23). The Nazi regime was a tyrannical totalitarian regime that committed horrific acts against humanity. Ratzinger’s experience of it, however, was that of the Church being marginalised, which threatened his Catholic faith and in turn, further shaped his views on relativism in the modern world. Young Ratzinger’s response was to deepen his identity with the Church as well as the Catholic subculture. Ratzinger did not see his experience with the Nazi regime as complicit with the horrific acts against humanity. In fact, Ratzinger shared later that he was unsure if “he would live to return home from this inferno” (Weigel, God’s Choice 160).

In 1943, while in seminary school, Ratzinger was drafted as a “Luftwaffenhelfer” (air force child soldier) and then was trained as German infantry (Thornton xxxix). Two years later, at the end of the war, Ratzinger abandoned his post and returned to his family in Traunstein. Ratzinger discovered upon his arrival home that American troops were using his house as headquarters, so he was instantly relocated to a POW camp in Germany. He was released when the war ended in the summer of 1945. Wasting no time, that November Ratzinger and his brother re-entered seminary school in Traunstein and attended the Saint Michael Seminary. He studied philosophy and theology at the University of Munich in the Higher School of Philosophy and Theology of Freising. In 1951, the Ratzinger brothers were ordained. His brother became a priest and Ratzinger remained in academia.
Ratzinger reflected years later on the Nazi regime and the role of his Catholicism: “Protestant churches were more easily co-opted by the Nazis because the ideal of nationalism and a nation church was more attractive to them” (Allen, The Rise 149). It is Ratzinger’s belief that the Catholic Church could not be corrupted by the promise of such idealisms. He continues to explain that “only a form of Christianity clear about its core beliefs, and equally clear about its system of authority, will have the inner strength to stand up against alien forces attempting to seduce or hijack it” (149). Such alien forces, according to Ratzinger, still exist “especially in form of rampant materialism and relativism in the West” (149). The effect of relativism in the modern world is troublesome, yet the foundations of the Church and Catholic belief provided Ratzinger with the means to resist the alien forces of the Nazi regime and today’s alien forces, such as, materialism, secularism and scientism, but more importantly relativism.

The Influence of Ratzinger’s Devout Catholic Family

Aspects of Ratzinger’s family, Catholicism, and academic acuity served as anchors during his formative years. Ratzinger was raised on the foundation of a strong Catholic family his parents were a “living parable” whose “example was always a key point” (Goryachkin). When asked about his family, George Ratzinger explained that their family life was slow and unfussy and described Catholicism as the “rhythm” to their daily life. Ratzinger felt lucky to have grown up near Utting, a spiritual centre in Europe at the heart of Bavaria, and recalls that his family’s “pilgrimages there are amongst the fondest memories of my childhood” (Goryachkin). Ratzinger said, “I felt thankful that my life was always tied to the sacrament of Easter from the very beginning” (Goryachkin). He
claims that his earliest memories were tied to the liturgy, and Ratzinger’s bond to the liturgy developed a deeper meaning later in his life. It greatly influenced his sensitivity and understanding of nature and the environment. He saw a connection between the creation and it’s natural pattern with the Catholic liturgical life. This connection will be explored later in this thesis, in the section on Benedict’s environmental teachings.

Ratzinger’s Early Appreciation for Nature

Ratzinger also seemed to be thoughtfully attuned to nature and his environment. He uses descriptive language that incorporates nature and the environment when he reflects on his childhood. He described his home in Traunstein as a, “wonderful old farmhouse full of secrets right on the edge of the forest. I could do whatever I wanted there. First of all, I could read, write; go to the forest whenever I pleased. I had created my personal dream world, full of poetry, but the changes… tore me out of there” (Goryachkin). It is evident that Ratzinger was deeply connected to his natural surroundings and was upset when his compulsory enlistment in Hitler Youth separated him from his Arcadian dream.

Weigel’s book provides an additional example of Ratzinger’s sensitivity towards his family and nature, after returning home from being a POW. Ratzinger reminiscing on this experience: “In my whole life I have never again had so magnificent a meal as the simple one that Mother then prepared for me from the vegetables of her own garden” (Milestones 46). This meal stands out for Ratzinger, most likely, because it marked a pivotal time in his life and history, yet what Ratzinger enjoyed most was the simple fact that this meal consisted of his mother’s home grown vegetables from her personal garden.
It is clear that Ratzinger keeps his family and the simple pleasures and basic benefits of nature at the centre of his being. Upon reflection Ratzinger says, “I am very glad that I spend a little of my lifetime in a real village. That I know the scent of soil and agriculture. That I know natural life, that I’ve been a part of it. That is why I kept grateful memories of that village time” (Goryachkin). He openly appreciates the natural village life and values the interrelationship of humans and the creation. These examples demonstrate Ratzinger’s acute sensitivity to nature and his environment.

There was one event, in particular, which solidifies Ratzinger’s relationship with nature. After being ordained at 24, Ratzinger joyfully recalls an archetypal event, if you will, that followed the Archbishop’s blessing. “There was an episode, during the Holy Orders Rights, which became a sign for me. A bird flew into the Cathedral, sat on the Alter and began to sing! I am not superstitious, but anyhow, for me it mean that what was happening was right” (Goryachkin; Milestones 99). This supports Ratzinger’s personal alignment with nature and his environment. Any trepidation Ratzinger had about devoting his life to the Catholic Church was nullified by a natural event. It was the singing of a bird that comforted Ratzinger and confirmed that what he was doing was right and good. His fondest memories as a child involved the structure of the Church and the playground of nature and the environment. These memories and natural events can be interpreted as Ratzinger’s first environmental views.

Intellectual Worldview: Academic, Scholarly, and Theological Framework

Ratzinger demonstrated an exceptional academic and theological curiosity and at this stage in life, he began to articulate his personal ideals regarding the Church and the
modern world. After being ordained he continued his education. In 1955 he received his PhD in theology. Ratzinger’s dissertation was on St. Augustine (345–430)\(^{20}\) and his habilitation on St. Bonaventure (1221–1274)\(^{21}\) in 1957. Then in 1958, Ratzinger became a professor in Freising and lectured on dogmatic and fundamental theology in the Higher School of Philosophy and Theology. Both Augustine and Bonaventure are the blueprint to Ratzinger’s intellectual worldview and they guide his approach to modern day issues.

**Academic and Scholastic Position: St. Augustine and St. Bonaventure**

Excited by the “youthful enthusiasms” of Henri de Lubac (Rowland, *Benedict* 113) and his new look on faith, Ratzinger saw a “new understanding of the unity of the Church and the Eucharist” (142). De Lubac’s works, *Catholicism* and *Corpus Mysticism*, inspired Ratzinger to write his dissertation on Augustine (*Milestones* 98), especially since de Lubac argued that modern Catholic faith is not so different from that of first century Christians (Rowland, *Benedict* 157). De Lubac later influenced Ratzinger when working with him on *Communio* and de Lubac’s understanding of “nature and grace.” Ratzinger’s dissertation focused on Augustine’s ecclesiology and his understanding of the Church as the “people and the house of God.”

In his youth, Augustine studied philosophy to discover truth and was much more philosophical about Christianity, but as Augustine matured his focus shifted onto the relationship between faith and reason connected by God’s love. This salvation-historical approach to faith and reason appealed to Ratzinger, since Augustine began with a metaphysical theology and moved to the historical understanding of Christianity.

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Ratzinger believes Augustine’s struggles – such as the marginalisation of Christianity by the Romans and the prevalence of paganism – still apply to modern problems like the secular and relativist societies in the West and the concept of Gaia.

In Augustine’s time described God as *caritas*, as a manifest of the Holy Spirit that unifies in Church the people of God. Salvation is not achieved solely through intellect, since it “consists in that being in the Church which is simultaneously a being-in-love” (Nichols 29). The Church as the “house of God” embodies the Invisible and makes the Church crucial for salvation through Jesus for the “people of God.” Ratzinger believes that Augustine’s “People of God” provided an “intrinsic unity in the foundational way of seeing the Church” (Jankunas 50).

Anthony Grafton’s article in *The New Yorker*, “Vatican Notebook,” discusses the influencers on Ratzinger and claims that Augustine and Bonaventure “showed that the most exalted figures in the Church could learn new truths” (46). Grafton acknowledged de Lubac influence on Ratzinger, since de Lubac believed the Church needed to accept knowledge from it’s past and “steep itself in long tradition of Catholic theology and exegesis as well as contemporary thought” (44). Grafton discusses in his article the discovery of truths by rejecting, embracing or conforming other doctrinal systems. He argues that through Augustine’s struggle with Donatism and Bonaventure’s handling of factions in the Franciscan Order opened the discovery of truth in other doctrinal systems.

Roman’s persecuted the early Christian church and demanded that Christian priests hand in their scriptures. The Donatist’s, an early pious Christian group from Northern Africa, declared that the priests that relinquished their scriptures must step down because they have infected the sacraments. Augustine rejected this and argued that
the Church must never exclude others and he rejected the Donatist’s movement for their lack of charity. Augustine’s charity “definition has remained crucial to Ratzinger in his later roles” (Grafton 44), as demonstrated through Benedict’s encyclical, titled *Dues Caritas Est* and *Caritas in Veritate*. Like Augustine, Benedict believed that the Church’s truth is grounded in communal participation of receiving the Eucharist (Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, February 22, 2007). Augustine was able to find this truth through his struggle with Donatism. Furthermore, the core of all heresy was Donatism’s *schism inveteratum*22 (Nichols 29), especially given that the Church is the “people and house of God” according to Augustine and Ratzinger.

As a “decided Augustinian” Ratzinger closely followed the *credo ut intelligam*,23 and believed that “just as creation comes from reason and is reasonable, faith is, so to speak, the fulfilment of creation and thus the door to understanding” (*Salt of the Earth* 33). Faith is a gift from God and it allows others to know of God’s love and revelation. The Church, Ratzinger asserts, must never be a used as a laboratory for theologians. “We are servants and don’t ourselves determine what the Church is” (*Salt of the Earth* 80). He refused to accept that the Church had to radically change in order to accommodate the culture of modernity. Ratzinger’s believed that certain bishops had lost their backbone and “in order to avoid conflict, they let the poison spread… and a bishop whose only concern is not to have any problems and to gloss over as many conflicts as possible, is an image I find repulsive” (*Salt of the Earth* 82). Instead, Ratzinger set out to recapture the

22. Nichols translates this as being the “[h]ard-necked persistence in separation from the Church’s community” (29).

23. Translates as, “I believe so that I may understand.”
essential spirit of Christianity by drawing inspiration from theological works and personalist scholars, while engaging with Scripture. Ratzinger emphasised the *sui generis* of revelation and “its insistence on the convertibility of being and love” (Rowland, Benedict 153).

Nichols argues that, “we tend to find people concerned with theology and philosophy of history at times of great crisis in the historical process itself” (34). Since, Ratzinger’s scholastic style is compatible to that of Bonaventure’s theology of history, it was no surprise that his *habilitation* was on Bonaventure (Rowland, Benedict 4). In the 1950s, salvation-history was under a microscope, studying its relation to metaphysics, so Ratzinger studied the renowned medieval theologian and advocate for salvation-history, Bonaventure. In his *habilitation* Ratzinger proposed that Bonaventure’s theology of history derives from eschatology, which endorsed a more positive relationship between salvation-history with metaphysics (Nichols 35).

Bonaventure, as the Minster General of the Franciscan Order, worked to establish peace between two Franciscan fractions and his theology of history derives from his response to Joachim of Fiore’s thought (Jankunas 52). Unlike Thomas Aquinas, who rejected Joachim’s teachings, Bonaventure’s approach was more corrective as he performed an ecclesial reinterpretation that centred Joachim’s thought back in tradition.

Ratzinger believed that “the whole of history develops in one unbroken line of meaning”, that the future “may be understood in the present on the basis of the past” and that “the exegesis of Scripture becomes a theology of history; the clarification of the past leads to the prophecy concerning the future” (qtd. in Nichols 37). The relationship

24. Translates as “uniqueness.”
between scripture and history is not just a collection of individual events, since this “unhistorical mode of thought” does not work for Christianity “because of the prophetic interpretation of the Old Testament history given in Scripture” (qtd. in Jankunas 58). Bonaventure and Ratzinger cautions against the Aristotelian’s philosophy of systematisation, since it promotes the limited view of free will (fate), the eternity of the world and the unity of human intellect. History must never be perceived as accidental, for Bonaventure and Ratzinger, history is “a saving time” (Jankunas 59).

Ratzinger concedes that, both Augustine and Bonaventure arrived at the same conclusion: while the Church hopes for peace in the future, it always loves in the present, and those who abide by Christ’s law of love have eternal peace in their hearts (Jankunas 60). The statement foreshadows Ratzinger’s critique of Marxism because Ratzinger saw that Marxism was only future or “ends” oriented and blamed religion’s charitable acts, for example, as pacifying and maintaining the oppressed status quo. Ratzinger’s struggles with Marxism, in turn, shaped his anti-relativism in the 1980s with regards to liberation theology and the reinventing of Jesus as a political figure. Ratzinger believed that humans need to reclaim their human dignity, and by learning about the true self, the limitedness of life, and human nature, humankind will accept God, who “came down from heaven to hold people by the hand and lead them to the true fulfilment of themselves and their lives” (60).

Augustine was able to discover God as *caritas* in his conversion and found truth by rejecting Donatism. Bonaventure, through his innovative corrections of Joachim’s thoughts, was able to discover a new truth, which allowed him to see historical events as a divine plan (Grafton 45). This period of Ratzinger’s life demonstrates the development
of his intellectual worldview and he began to articulate his own ideas on the modern world and the Church.

Contemporary Theological Landscape

Ratzinger was typical of his generation, frustrated by the Neo-Scholasticism that was fostered by Leo XII’s *Aeterni Patris* (1879). In 1946, as a young student, Ratzinger concluded that scholasticism was too dry and impersonal. His seminary prefect, Alfred Lapple, joked that such scholasticism “wasn’t his beer” and that Ratzinger was “not interested in defining God by abstract concepts” (qtd. in Rowland, *Ratzinger* 2-3).

Ratzinger redirected his focus to more “personalist scholars,” like Martin Buber, and philosophical and theological figures, such as, John Henry Newman. Ratzinger recounts in *Milestones* that he “wanted not only to do theology in the narrower sense but to listen to the voices of and today” (42). Paying close attention to the developments in natural science, Ratzinger felt “with the breakthroughs made by Planck, Heisenberg, and Einstein, the sciences were once again on their way to God” (*Milestones* 42–43). An analysis of these figures will show their influence on Ratzinger’s intellectual worldview.

*Martin Buber and John Henry Newman.* Martin Buber, a mid-twentieth-century Jewish philosopher and personalist scholar solidified Ratzinger’s embrace of personalist scholasticism. Ratzinger favoured Buber when trying to address the complexities of being human (*Introduction* 45), since he provided a “precise description of the situation of man

confronted with the question of God” (*Introduction* 46). Ratzinger admired that Buber upheld his theology, despite the hatred and anti-Semitism of the Nazi regime. Buber was “the only one, who remained in the forefront of German literature throughout the last half-century, representing the Jewish race” and instead of assimilating, he strove to “recapture the essential spirit of Judaism” (Balthasar, *Martin Buber* 9). This greatly appealed to Ratzinger, and since 1968 Ratzinger has tried to recapture the spirit of the Church “in the face of militant secularism” and internal issues from within the Church (Rowland, *Benedict* 152). It is clear that Buber, his personal scholastic style and his refusal to assimilate, influenced Ratzinger’s intellectual worldview.

Ratzinger grew up in a musical household and one similarity with Newman is their passion for music. Newman played an important role in Ratzinger’s understanding of Christianity in history, since he argued for a shift in Catholic understanding of historical change that must pay attention to the meaning and task of the history of dogma (Nichols 163). In other words, Tradition is not created from a collection of historical elements separate from Revelation; therefore, historical development is important for Tradition (Rowland, *Benedict* 157). Ratzinger interprets Newman’s development as “one of the truly fundamental concepts of Catholicism” (qtd. in Nichols 174), especially given the “Church’s growing” concept, which the Second Vatican Council adopted to avoid the “archaising sterility” that separated the Church from modern society. The Church, however, must not develop if only to “catch up” with the times as this would lose the Church’s origin. Newman inspired Ratzinger and influenced his intellectual worldview with regards to the development of the Church under the pressure of modern society.
Second Vatican Council (1962–1965)

During the Second Vatican Council, Ratzinger taught in Münster (1963–1966) and then in Tübingen (1966–1969). In Tübingen, Ratzinger became close to his colleague Hans Küng as well as Karl Rahner. While Ratzinger had a passion for the academic and theological study of Catholicism in the modern world, he never was exclusively a professor. Ratzinger was the *peritus* to the Archbishop of Cologne, Cardinal Joseph Frings, during the Second Vatican Council. Before the age of forty, Ratzinger’s theological expertise was necessary and was required by the Second Vatican Council.

Ressourcement versus Aggiornamento

Ratzinger’s involvement with the Second Vatican Council is significant because both his theological and academic expertise was required to help the Church during a time of change. At the time, there were two main currents within the progressive majority of Catholics. The split was between the *ressourcement* division and the *aggiornamento* division. The *ressourcement* division wanted the Church to “return to the sources” in order to recover the initial teachings of Christian tradition during the earlier stage of the Church. The *aggiornamento* division, on the other hand, wanted a “renewal” as they were looking to reconcile the Church and Christian tradition with the contemporary world. These groups, plainly speaking, wanted to either look back or to look forward, regarding the role and position of the modern Catholic Church. It was Ratzinger’s view that the Church needed a “restoration.” The Church’s role in the modern world needed to balance itself between an indiscriminate openness to the modern world, given the modern world’s

positive interpretation of agnosticism and atheism, to the values and orientation within Catholic totality (Allen, *The Rise* 150-51). On the surface, Ratzinger’s intellectual worldview, shaped by the likes of Augustine, Bonaventure, Buber, and Newman, made it almost obvious that he would side with the *ressourcement* movement, as he did. Yet as mentioned earlier, Ratzinger worked with and was close to renowned the theologians and scholars Küng and Rahner, and in the 1960s the public perception of Ratzinger was actually that of a radical (Rowland, *Ratzinger* 11). Ratzinger changed course and ended his theological views with those of Küng and Rahner. This transition period for Ratzinger is best exemplified through the two leading journals *Concilium* and *Communio*. A closer reading of these journals will highlight their differences and will clearly demonstrate Ratzinger’s theological position on the Church in the 1960s and 1970s.

Concilium versus Communio

*Concilium*, was founded in 1965 by Rahner and Küng and was a beacon for the more liberal and reformist approach to the Second Vatican. Ratzinger’s labelling as a radical and his ties to liberal theologians was not just because he was a colleague of Küng in Tübingen, but that, in fact, for a short period of time Ratzinger was a actually member of the board for the journal *Concilium* (Rowland, *Ratzinger* 23). Ratzinger, however, felt the *Concilium* was an “application of a hermeneutic of rupture” as they wanted a complete break from the pre-Conciliar agenda (Rowland, *Benedict* 5). This approach contradicted Ratzinger’s intellectual worldview and so his association with those critical of the theological establishment dwindled by the early 1970s. The other journal *Communio*, “offered a hermeneutics of continuity,” which greatly appealed to Ratzinger.
Communio started several years after Concilium, by individuals who were dissatisfied with Concilium’s emphasis on the aggiornamento movements of the Second Vatican Council. Communio believed that the problems with Catholicism arose as early as the sixteenth century (Rowland, Benedict 5; cf. Ratzinger, Beginning 83). The following section consists primarily of Ratzinger’s 1992 article, “Communio: A Program” as it provides, in great detail, the making of Communio and reveals the journal’s intention as well as its theological disposition.

The journal was first published in 1972, but was originally founded in 1969 by Hans Urs von Balthasar, Henri de Lubac, Louise Boyer, Jorge Medina, Marie-Joseph Le Guillou (who later resigned due to health reasons), and Ratzinger himself. Ratzinger accredits the impetus for Communio to Balthasar and his initial desire to tackle these issues in the form of a book. Ratzinger explains, “Balthasar perceived with great acuity the process by which relevance became more important than truth.” His understanding of Balthasar’s interpretation of the dilemma of truth greatly influenced Ratzinger’s struggle with relativism. Balthasar’s literature provided insightful teachings about the struggles of Catholicism in the modern world. Ratzinger quotes Balthasar’s explanation of Communio’s objective in 1972: “It is not a matter of bravado, but of Christian courage, to expose oneself to risk.” Theology must only be measured according to its content and not by distinguishing it as conservative or progressive.

In 1969 Balthasar decided to start a journal that would be able to respond to a wide range of questions from different cultures and currents. In the fall of 1969, the

27. Ratzinger gave examples of Balthasar’s 1966 The Movement of Christian Witness, which emphasised the importance to differentiate Gnosticism from Christianity and his 1965 Who is a Christian?, which urged the readers to distinguish authentic Christianity from a homemade fantasy of Christianity.
founders of *Communio* agreed that the journal was going to be a French – German collaboration. The Italian journal, *Comunione e Liberazione*, inspired the journal’s title, since it encompassed the essence of *Communio*’s message. *Communio*’s structure would be different with a fresher internationality of “a harmonious coexistence of unity and difference.” Balthasar recognised that even between European countries, “what counts as a burning question for one culture remains completely foreign to another.” Ratzinger believed that the combination of theology and culture was a distinguishing feature. The objective of this journal was to unite Christians through common faith, “independently of their membership in particular communities.”

Ratzinger explains that the Augustinian phrase “people of God” was mistakenly associated with the Second Vatican Council and so “was quickly contrasted with a hierarchical understanding of the Church.” This misunderstanding resulted in the demand for “democratic determinism” for the Church and that God was removed from the phrase, “people of God.” *Communio* was equated with this misinterpretation of “people of God,” which, Ratzinger argued, made it an entirely horizontal notion. This represented a movement of a “universal decree of everyone,” but undermined “an ecclesiology based entirely on the local Church.” Ratzinger claimed that such a perception of the Second Vatican Council derived from those who split the Second Vatican’s texts into two categories of either acceptable and progressive or unacceptable and old-fashioned. For Ratzinger, dividing into acceptable and unacceptable is a demonstration of the relativising of *one* set of texts, which cannot be arbitrarily divided or picked through.

This view is misguided since Vatican I and Vatican II are bound together through the conciliar documents of the Church and one cannot simply separate the old from the
new. This would result in conciliar texts being nothing more than proposals for a political
convention, reducing the Church to merely a political party. The Church is “not higher
than the Word of God but serves it and therefore teaches only what is handed on to it”
(Dei Verbum No. 10) and the council, dedicated to the Word of God and to the tradition,
must teach what has already been taught. For Ratzinger, the Church, tradition and the
Word of God is a truth that cannot and must not be relativised. Under the guise of
progress, Ratzinger believed that relativism had trickled into the Church and threatens to
reduce the council to a political party. Ratzinger believed there is a way to balance
tradition and the origin of the Church with the new world, but it cannot be done by
ignoring the teachings and truths of the past that still apply for the future. Ratzinger
offered his understand it of communio, given the misinterpretation of the phrase
communio post-Second Vatican Council.

First and foremost, “communio is not a sociological but a theological notion, one
which even extends to the realm of ontology.” Ratzinger draws from Balthasar’s
explanation on the meaning of communio. According to Balthasar, it was human nature
that made it possible for communication; humans are not just nature, they are persons.
Each person “represents a unique way of being human different from everyone else…
nature alone is not sufficient to communicate the inner sensibility of persons.” Ratzinger
elaborated on this and said that individuality, in fact, divides us but that being a person
opens us because humans, by nature, are related. This distinction between the individual
and the person demonstrates Ratzinger’s strong belief in anthropocentrism.

The distinction between a Church from above or below is fairly simple. A church
from “below” is a sociological quantity that diminishes Jesus’s significance, and is
nothing more than a society with religious goals. Ratzinger proposes, that the Church be based on an ecclesiology of *communio* that derives its love and thought from the “real above.” Therefore, a journal titled *Communio* needs to strive for this “real above” and develop an anthropology, by rendering the Word in every response to all questions. There was an urgency for this because Europeans were not only threatened by paganism but had a “thirst for God.” Ratzinger believed that this “thirst” would not be quenched through repetitive discussions seeking to reinvent the church, for the Church must be united to satisfy this thirst.

*Communio* must be understood theologically, in order to draw forth the sacraments and its ecclesiological notion realised. The Church is only whole through the sacraments and tradition grows into identity, defining what it means to be a Catholic. God is whole and God is humanity’s peace. When the Church faces a crisis and uses it as an opportunity for renewal, it must only do so by “opening up to the whole of Catholicism” and guarantee “they fit in with the unity of the tradition.”

Ultimately for Ratzinger caring for the human community is true communion with God. The ethical and social aspects of this care that are inspired through God are the essence of *communio*. Therefore, this journal must be open to contemporary ethical and social questions and “illuminate the problems of the economy and of politics with the light of God’s Word by attending equally to critical and constructive commentary.” The Church has a role with social issues, but it must never be political. Ratzinger concludes the article by re-quotting Balthasar’s saying: “It is not a matter of bravado, but of Christian courage, to expose oneself to risk.” This quote resonates with how the Church
in modern society is relegated to the private sphere as well as the range of issue that the modern world faces, like relativism and the environmental crisis.

20th-Century Milestones: 1968, 1989, and the Onset of Relativism

Ratzinger’s Introduction to Christianity is considered to be one of his most prevalent and widely read Christian books published in 1968. It was originally a collection of his lectures on faith given at the University of Tübingen in the summer of 1967. Ratzinger addressed the deliberated questions of belief and communal expression while examining the substance of Catholic doctrine. Ratzinger’s tackled the range of topics and questions, which were presented in the late 1960s regarding contemporary culture and theological scholarship. Ratzinger wrote three prefaces 1968, 1969, and 2004.

In the 2004 edition Ratzinger remarked that there were two milestones at the end of the twentieth century: 1968 and 1989. Ratzinger’s attention to these two milestones in the 2004 preface is noteworthy as it illustrates Ratzinger’s hindsight reflections on this time. He saw that these two milestones were missed opportunities for Christian faith. These missed opportunities devastated the influence and authority of the Christian faith in the modern world. The church lost the ability to shape history by treating Marxism as the only valid philosophy, which ended up marginalising God’s role in history. It also allowed the uncontrolled development of New Age religions, which by asserting that any and all salvation paths were equal introduced a form of relativism that made Jesus an enlightened being amongst many, no longer the Incarnation.

The new generation of 1968 were dissatisfied with the post-war efforts and “viewed the entire course of history since the triumph of Christianity as a mistake and
failure” (Introduction 11). They were convinced they had discovered a better path through Marxist philosophy. Ratzinger argued that in the late 1960s the Church “was trying to emerge again from the ghetto to which it has been relegated since the nineteenth century and to become involved once more in the world at large” (Introduction 13). The intention of the Second Vatican Council was, in fact, to endow “Christianity once more with the power to shape history” (Introduction 13). Nevertheless, the Parisian barricades in 1968\(^{28}\) demonstrated how new ideas were being put into practice, but their “new fusion of the Christian impulse with secular and political action, was like a lightening bolt” (Introduction 13-14) that ignited the liberation theology movement in South America. Ratzinger believed that the Christian faith missed this opportunity to help shape the world by bridging common causes with the “worldly wisdom of the hour” (Introduction 14). Instead, the Marxist philosophy was widely accepted that redemption, salvation, and freedom could be attained without faith or religion. Marxist philosophy merged religious liberation with political and economic liberation -- “whoever makes Marx the philosopher of theology adopts the primacy of politics and economics and as a result the redemption of mankind ends up occurring through the vehicles of politics and economics” (Rowland, Benedict 7; cf. Ratzinger, Introduction 15). Such practices lose the role of God and alter the figure of Christ as political. Christianity was yielded to the assumption that “faith in God is something subjective, which belongs in the private realm

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28. Ratzinger said it was “…putting into practice a new fusion of the Church and the world under the banner of the revolution that was supposed to bring, at last, the dawn of a better age. The leading role played by Catholic and Protestant student groups in the revolutionary upheavals at universities, both in Europe and beyond, confirmed this trend” (Introduction 14).
and not in the common activities of public life where, in order to get along, people have to behave now *etsi Deus non darecture*” (Rowland, *Benedict 7*).²⁹

The second missed opportunity for Christian faith was in 1989 and the fall of European Socialism, which left behind both ruined souls and ruined lands. Ratzinger claimed, “Christianity failed at that historical moment to make itself heard as an epoch-making alternative” (Introduction 11). So Marxism continued as the leading, “ethically motivated guide to the future that was at the same time consistent with a scientific worldview” (Introduction 12). People were now sceptical of any overarching moral promises because that was what Marxist presented itself to be, and so “believed that they had to dispense with ethical principles for the time being” (Introduction 12). Ratzinger reflects on this time in history and said that the Church needed to “rediscover its voice, so as to ‘introduce’ the new millennium to its message and to make it comprehensible as a general guide for the future” (Introduction 12).

The events of 1989 “deepened the general perplexity and nourished scepticism about great ideals” (Introduction 18). The New Age religions of this time “were looking for experience, an encounter with the entirely Other” (Introduction 19). This was problematic for Ratzinger because society saw the Church as inconvenient, dogma as “bothersome” and put heavy emphasis on the mystical dimension of religion. What became of most importance was not the institution itself, but trying to attain the ineffable. This resulted in the belief that humanity could never *know* God and attempting to *know* God can only be symbolic (cf. Ratzinger, *Beginning* 84-86). Since it was argued that no one could *know* God and, through personal mystical experience everyone equally would

²⁹. Translates “as if there were no God.”
be able to discover the one Eternal Being on whichever path they took. This relativism of religion dramatically affected Christianity. It equated Jesus as one of many enlightened beings, such as Buddha, and it altered the concept of a personal God in Jesus (Ratzinger, *Introduction* 22-23). In his book *Introduction to Christianity* Ratzinger’s anti-relativism is revealed, particularly when it comes to religious salvation as all being equal. Society’s objection to traditional religion resulted in religion’s relativisation, which reduced Jesus to a Buddha equivalent and made the act of knowing God a mystical experience of symbols, which denies the personal God through Jesus. Essentially it separated Jesus from God as just someone who knew God well.

Marxists and modern liberally inspired Catholics allowed their political and social interests to transform their theology, rather than the other way around. Ratzinger believes that Christianity struggled to present itself as a practical alternative to the 1968 Marxist ideologies and the 1989 post-modern nihilist trends and today struggles with relativism.

**Ratzinger’s Underlying Trepidation with Relativism in the Modern World**

Ratzinger identified a source of relativistic problems in the emergence of post-modern theologies “which challenged the very notion of Christianity as a master narrative, valid for all ages and cultures” (Rowland, *Benedict* 8). Jesus is no longer God incarnate, but is just someone special that experienced God. Rowland explains that for Ratzinger, the fundamental crisis of our age was, and likely still is, the necessity of “developing a Catholic understanding of the mediation of history in the realm of ontology”³⁰ (Rowland, *Benedict* 8). Dr Robert Moynihan’s editorial for *Inside the

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³⁰. My understanding of this particular quote is that the mediation of history, with regards to Catholic theology, gets at the core of the realm of being. Essentially, it is the
Vatican, argued that Ratzinger’s intentions for the Church were to unite the “groups in the West that share common beliefs in the eternal destiny of human beings, in the sacredness of human life.” Moreover, Ratzinger is trying to reveal “the existence of a moral standard which is true for all times and in all places (against the relativism of the modern secular culture).” Ratzinger primary duty is towards Catholic faith and to defend it in a way that is sensitive to history, cultural and linguistic differences and is “aware that the formulae in which doctrines are expressed can sometimes be so problematic that new language, new formulae, need to be considered” (Rowland, Benedict 151).

As discussed earlier, Ratzinger has repeatedly defended Catholic theology “in the face of militant secularism and various crises internally created” (Rowland, Benedict 152). Philip Blosser agrees that this predicament of post-Conciliar Catholic practice has had to repeatedly defend itself for decades against those that “portrayed our church as a dinosaur that is either an impediment to social progress or simply irrelevant” (qtd. in Rowland, Benedict 152). Ratzinger did not want to assimilate into modern society; he strove to recapture the true essence of Christianity. Ratzinger’s intellectual worldview developed from the works of Augustine, Bonaventure, Buber, Newman, de Lubac, and Balthasar, while engaging with scripture. Ratzinger “wove together a synthesis of insights into successive theological crises. In every instance he highlighted the *sui generis* character of Christian Revelation” (Rowland, Benedict 153).

more ephemeral (or transient) idea (or concept) of being verses the idea (or concept) of knowing.
Chapter V

The Environmental Teachings of Ratzinger

Ratzinger published over forty books prior to his election as Pope. In these works, he implicitly and explicitly addressed his concerns for the environment, his understanding of the creation and the role of the Church.

Before John Paul’s explicit address on the ecological issues in his 1990 Peace Statement, Ratzinger wrote *In the Beginning: A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall* in 1986.\(^{31}\) This book entailed a series of homilies on Genesis, which explores the relationship found between humanity, God, and the creation. Ratzinger discussed the implications of these intricate relationships – between humanity, God, and the creation – with regard to environmental responsibility. This supports this thesis’s argument that Ratzinger has a standing, personal, and theological, outlook on nature, the role of humans, and the Church with the creation.

As mentioned in Chapter IV, Ratzinger always felt closely connected to the Church’s liturgy and his “earliest memories [were] connected to the liturgy” (Goryachkin).\(^{32}\) Ratzinger’s views on the creation and the Church’s liturgy show his sensitivity to nature and it’s patterns. Ratzinger believes that the Creation was made to worship (*Beginning 27*) and that the Church’s liturgy involves the cosmos. “Christian

\(^{31}\) It was later translated into English and released in 1995.

\(^{32}\) See Goryachkin’s documentary for full quote.
worship is cosmic worship. In it we pray and sing in concert with everything ‘in heaven, on earth, and under the earth’; we join in with the praise rendered by the sun and the stars’ (The Feast of Faith 143). He does not advocate for the worship of nature. Instead, he connects the natural rhythms of the Church’s liturgy and worship with the natural rhythms of nature and the cosmos.33

Ratzinger states that humans were commanded “to look after the world as God’s creation, and do to so in accordance with the rhythm and the logic of creation” (Beginning 34). When this rhythm34 is thrown off nature will resist, especially if nature is uncontrollably consumed. Human dominion over nature “does not mean a violence exploitation of nature” it requires a better understanding, which implies “a caution in the way in which we serve nature and nature serves us” (Values 159). Ratzinger believed that the creation’s resistance to the “manipulation by men has become a new factor in the intellectual situation in the last decade. It is impossible to evade the question of the limits of science and of the criteria it must follow” (Turning 95). Ratzinger argues for a better understanding of reciprocity between nature and humans and since humanity is fundamentally good, Ratzinger argues, humans have a unique role to protect the creation as a whole, which implies they have a moral environmental responsibility (Beginning 43).

Aware of these consequences, Ratzinger cautions against the total surrendering to technology and science. He states that scientific rationality has “both enormous possibilities and enormous menaces” (Christianity 29). One of these menaces is that science has a pathological form that can strip humanity of all power and can “serve

33. See Ratzinger, Milestones 17.

34. See Ratzinger, In The Beginning 37.
inhumanity” with regards to weapons of mass destruction (Values 26). There are limits to science and technology despite that they create new opportunities for humankind (Faith 94). Since society’s advancements in technology and science require the presence of God then science and technology also require a certain amount of respect because it in turn, pays respect to God (Ratzinger Report 98).

Ratzinger states: “I think that the greatness of man is more obvious to us nowadays than ever before – and, of course, the danger of falling from such greatness. For the greater a creature is, the greater the danger it runs” (God 119). Ratzinger believes Christianity needs to remember that there is no separation between matter and God and that this relationship is a confession “of the Creator God and of the world as creation” (Principles 29).

Ratzinger recognised the rumblings of a crisis for humans and the environment and said: “We can win the future only if we do not lose the creation” (Beginning 100). A couple years before he was elected as Pope, in Truth and Tolerance, Ratzinger wrote:

[The] ecological disaster could serve as a warning to us, that we may see where science is no longer at the service of truth, but is destructive both of the world and of man. The ability to hear such warnings, the will to let oneself be purified by the truth, is essential. (159)

Ratzinger was outspoken regarding his concerns of the environmental crisis. This background, prior to his papal election, demonstrates that he entered this position not only with a proficient intellectual worldview and a strong traditional Catholic foundation, but also with a clear environmental opinion that accepted that there was a crisis that needed to be addressed. Ratzinger’s care for the creation and correlation of the natural rhythm of the cosmos with the Church’s liturgy demonstrate his theological
environmental stance, but his anthropocentric assessment of humans in the creation, his wariness of science and technology, and his desire to seek truth display the effect of his anti-relativism on his environmental views.

This thesis argues that Benedict’s environmental stance is unique as it coincides with his fight against relativism in the modern world. More specifically, Benedict is concerned with the negative impact that relativism has on environmental ethics and environmental responsibility. The next section will examine Benedict’s Catholic environmental teachings his encyclicals, as well as other works promulgated during his papacy.  

35. See Silecchia’s article, “Discerning the Environmental Perspective of Pope Benedict XVI,” on how all of Benedict’s “theological and scholarly writings to date reflect an intricate, thoughtful reflection on the created world and the responsibility of humanity to that world” (228).

36. The Environment, published in 2012, is a patchwork collection of Benedict’s environmental exhortations, edited by Jacquelyn Lindsay and introduction by Cardinal Peter K. A. Turkson, and Woodeene Koenig-Bricker’s, Ten Commandments for the Environment published in 2010, explore in depth the Benedict’s environmental views.
Chapter VI
Benedict’s Catholic Environmental Teaching: 2006–2009

As demonstrated, the encyclicals over the past century have been closely analysed in this thesis in order to determine the Catholic social teachings on the environment. This section will similarly analyse Benedict’s three encyclicals, *Dues Caritas Est* (2006), *Spe Salvi* (2007), and *Caritas in Veritate* (2009), in order to highlight Benedict’s Catholic environmental teachings. This study will reveal how Benedict incorporates the Catholic environmental teachings from previous encyclicals and how he develops these teachings in a way that expresses his anti-relativism.

Deus Caritas Est

A year after his election as Pope in 2006, Benedict promulgated his first encyclical, titled *Deus Caritas Est*. Benedict’s encyclical appears to be more philosophical compared to previous encyclicals (cf. John Paul VS), as it deals with the abstract concept of love and the “essential facts concerning God’s love for man and the intrinsic connection for this love with human love” (“Abiding in God” 7). Yet *Deus Caritas Est* is not lost in the clouds as it gives an “actual practice of the commandment to love one’s neighbour” (7).

Since Benedict’s environmental views stem from his creation theology (“Discerning”), and revolve around God as the Creator, he argues that the universe “has its source in God” and through “God himself who is the source of all that exists; the
whole world comes into existence by the power of his creative Word” (No. 9). Benedict
places the intentions of God in the creation, arguing that belief is not enough for creation
care. God loves humanity, but God’s love “is an elective love” and it derives “precisely
with a view [of] healing the whole human race” (No. 9).

Benedict illustrates his view that humans are exceptional by explaining the
Bible’s “account of the solitude of Adam” and that “all other creatures, not one is capable
of being the helper that man needs” (No. 11) so God created another human, Eve. The
pre-eminence of humans in the creation is repeated in previous encyclicals and this thesis
called anthropocentrism.

The subsection, “Justice and Charity” in Deus Caritas Est addresses the intricate
dance of State and Church when it comes to these issues. For Benedict, “justice must be a
fundamental norm of the State” and the goal of a “just social order is to guarantee to each
person” their rights to the collective goods. Deus Caritas Est believes this “has always
been emphasized by Christian teaching on the State and by the Church’s social doctrine”
(No. 26). Benedict elaborates on these problems when discussing workers rights and the
sensitive roles that both State and Church play. It is evident that Benedict believes that
every person is entitled to justice, social order, and their “share of the community’s
goods” (No. 26). While this does not explicitly depict the environmental components of
justice and charity, it does support the human right to their share of the community’s
goods. This illuminates Catholic environmental teachings of the equal distribution of
resources. Benedict explored the obstacles for justice and charity with respect to the
separation of Church and State.
Benedict elaborated on the complex role the State has within society and, predictably, references St. Augustine on this issue. He paraphrases Augustine’s view that “a State which is not governed according to justice would be just a bunch of thieves” (No. 28a). This confirms that the State has a critical role with the governance of society and that it must govern with justice as its guiding principle. The Church has a role with justice, since it involves an “important human responsibility.” Deus Caritas Est argues that the Church is “duty-bound” to share with society its requirement for justice. Benedict argues that this would further secure the role of justice in politics. This will be accomplished through the “purification of reason and through ethical formation” of justice (No. 28a). Benedict does not argue that the Church replace the State, but does argue that the Church must not “remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice” (No. 28a).

Ultimately, a just society must be a political achievement. The role of Church and State for social justice reveals more Catholic environmental teachings, such as: the equal distribution of resources, the qualified endorsement of private property, and authentic human development. This encyclical covers fundamental Catholic teachings that, as we have seen in previous encyclicals, often overlap with environmental concerns.

Benedict’s writings on God’s love with the creation and humans, the role of Church and State with social justice issues, and the power of individual action all contain Catholic environmental teachings. Deus Caritas Est makes an environmental reference that echoes Catholic environmental teaching on the wariness of technology and science. “Despite the great advances made in science and technology, each day we see how much suffering there is in the world on account of different types of poverty, both material and spiritual” (No. 30a). Human suffering, for Benedict, can never be truly remedied by
technology and science, and human suffering is magnified through the lack of altruistic uses of science and technology. The Church’s involvement to end this suffering, Benedict asserts, is that society must focus more on the present and less on the future.

Immediate action has a momentous influence on the larger society. Society, as Benedict sees it, is so blindsided by the future that it is unable to act in the now. Deus Caritas Est argues that the influence of Marxism and the belief that charity maintains the status quo has caused society to speculate on the possible harm charity could have in the future. Marxism argues that those engaged “in charitable initiative [are] actually serving [the] unjust system” that they struggle to break free from (No. 31b). Benedict believes this is an inhuman philosophy -- “One does not make the world more human by refusing to act humanely here and now” (No. 31b). His reflection on Marxism provides a clearer outlook on justice and social obligations, since Deus Caritas Est argues we can “contribute to a better world only by personally doing good now” (No. 31b). Instead of losing ourselves in the obscurities of State and Church, the importance of individual action must never be overlooked. Equally significant to individual action is the importance of “now.” Benedict argues that “[p]eople of the present are sacrificed to the moloch of the future” and this “effective realization is at best doubtful” (No. 31b).

Society today has become a slave to the future and has forgotten of importance of now. The urgency of now with a collaboration of Church and State reflects Benedict’s environmental views. For the protection of the environment he argues for the “pressing need for science and religion to work together to safeguard the gifts of nature and to promote responsible stewardship” (Benedict, “Letter to the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople” September, 2007).
Circling back to the negative influences of Marxism, Benedict accepts that not all forms of charity benefit society. Benedict speaks specifically of Christian charity and warns that such charities “they must not be inspired by ideologies aimed at improving the world, but should rather be guided by the faith which works through love” (No. 33). Benedict upholds that the Christian practice of charitable “activity will always be insufficient unless it visibly expresses a love for man” and must be grounded in Jesus’s love (No. 34). For Benedict charitable duty is grace (No. 35) and humans are instruments in God’s hands. He asserts that humanity today is weighed down by the “presumption of thinking that we alone are personally responsible for building a better world” (No. 35). There are two extremes that arise when humanity alone is troubled with bettering the world: the ideology, which attempts to do what God cannot and fully resolve all earthly problems, or that humanity would “give in to inertia, since it would seem that in any event nothing can be accomplished” (No. 36). These two extremes, according to Benedict, result in contempt for humanity. He asks: “When people claim to build a case against God in defence of man, on whom can they depend when human activity proves powerless” (No. 37)? This demonstrates how Benedict’s anti-relativism plays out regarding the environmental crisis. It is a daunting task and attempting to do it all alone, Benedict would argue, means that without God, the crisis would never be truly resolved. Equally bad would be a totally defeatist attitude, which denies the possibility to ever make an ultimate or significant change. Both of these extremes exemplify certain environmental attitudes and both are subjected to relativism. For Benedict, it is in these moments of deepest human despair that faith is reaffirmed. This question also applies to
Catholic environmental teaching of the wariness of technology, which will be further addressed in his next encyclical, *Spe Salvi*, with reference to Bacon’s vision.

*Spe Salvi*

Only a year later, in 2007, Benedict promulgated his second encyclical. Even though *Spe Salvi* is not a social encyclical and does not directly address policy questions, its contrast between Christian hope and hope in technological progress lays one of the most important foundations for Benedict’s environmentalism. This encyclical introduces Bacon’s “salvation of the soul” and faith in progress as concepts and mentalities that not only harm the environment but also have allowed relativism to prevail.

*Spe Salvi* uses the examples set by historical figures that also struggled to define and protect their faith during the early Church’s experience of persecution. Hope and faith were used interchangeably in several passages in the Bible and before Jesus people where “without hope and without God in the world” (No. 2). Christians are distinguished due to: their faith in God, how they know “their life will not end in emptiness,” and that only through this “it become possible to live in the present” (No. 2). The Christian message as not just to share the Good News, the message is to “make things happen and is life-changing” (No. 2). As members of the early Church saw it, the objective of Christianity is “performative” not “informative.” This distinction is pivotal when considering the role of Christianity in the modern world.

Benedict claims the modern world has created a new version of hope, and over the course of human history the modern Christian understanding of hope has also lost its historical roots. “How did we come to conceive the Christian project as a selfish search
for salvation which rejects the idea of serving others” (No. 16)? The discovery of America initiated the modern age, since its development was achieved through only new technical advancements. The basis of this view is best expressed through Francis Bacon’s thought. Benedict argues that, “the new correlation of experiment and method that enables [humanity] to arrive at an interpretation of nature in conformity… and thus finally to achieve ‘the triumph of art over nature’” (No. 16). Bacon’s novel vision of science and praxis has affected the theological application, and this new correlation of science and praxis insinuates that dominion over nature can be restored. Benedict asserts redemption, “the restoration of the lost ‘Paradise’ is no longer expected from faith, but from the newly discovered link between science and praxis” (No. 17). This is a false step, for humanity is “redeemed by love,” not science and technology (No. 26). This pushed faith into the private sphere and made faith irrelevant in the modern world. It is this programmatic vision, which “determined the trajectory of modern times…[and] shapes the present-day crisis of faith which is essentially a crisis of Christian hope” (No. 17). Benedict argued that hope must acquire a new form, called faith in progress. Bacon believed new technologies and discoveries were the tip of the iceberg and that with “the interplay of science and praxis, totally new discoveries will follow, a totally new world will emerge, the kingdom of man” (No. 17).

This view of “the kingdom of man” is extremely problematic for Benedict, since it argues that progress has two central components: reason and freedom. It relies on the authority of reason, which is considered “a force for the good,” and progress promises a freedom to eliminate dependency so that humans can become more fully themselves. Benedict believes the flaw with this thinking is that both reason and freedom have
intrinsic goodness, which can perfect the new human community. When progress is only technologically and individually oriented it foregoes the common good and harms human dignity. “If technical progress is not matched by corresponding progress in man's ethical formation, in man's inner growth (cf. Eph 3:16; 2 Cor. 4:16), then it is not progress at all, but a threat for man and for the world” (No. 22). Benedict argues that a purely technological progress not only threatens all of humanity, but also the world and rejects that “the reason behind action and capacity for action” is the entirety of reason (No. 23). Progress “needs moral growth on the part of humanity” so that reason combines with “the saving forces of faith… Only thus does reason become truly human” (No. 23). Freedom requires a convergence of various freedoms and must be “determined by a common intrinsic criterion of measurement” for human freedom. A “‘Kingdom of God’ accomplished without God,” Benedict reasserts, “ends up as the ‘perverse end’ of all things” (No. 23).

Spe Salvi argues that humanity needs God, and reason “needs faith if it is to be completely itself: reason and faith need one another in order to fulfil their true nature and their mission” (No. 23). Progress must always be human oriented and inspired by God, otherwise progress will only be individualistic and materialistic. Reason, as a force for good, would no longer motivate progress and genuine human freedom could never be achieved through purely technological progress. Benedict’s insight about such progress, purely technological motivated by false reasons and freedoms, is that it contributed to creating the environmental crisis. Society has lost touch of the centrality of humans in progress and is overly consumed by technology. Humanity’s desire to acquire the
kingdom of God without God, according to Benedict, endangers the very existence of humanity through the threat of the environmental crisis.

Nevertheless, technological progress is widely accepted in modern society, since other forms of progress “can never be self-evident in the same way as material inventions” and are “not readily at hand like tools that we use” (No. 24). Benedict argues progress must be built on previous generations’ knowledge and experience and should “draw upon the moral treasury of the whole of humanity” (No. 24). In order to maintain human affairs structures and institutions alone cannot ensure the well-being of the world -- “good structures help, but of themselves they are not enough” (No. 25). Such structures only work if a local community is motivated by their shared conviction that can “assent freely to the social order” (No. 24a). Freedom must prevail for the common good, because free consent “to the good never exists simply by itself” (No. 24b). *Spe Salvi* demonstrates why technological progress on its own is not only insufficient but also dangerous. Structures must always be motivated by local needs in order to promote social order and protect human freedoms.

Francis Bacon launched this type of modern day hope, and placed his faith in science and technology, arguing that humanity “would be redeemed through science” (No. 25). Yet, this view is deceptive as it “asks too much of science” (No. 25). It resulted in the false belief of humanity’s independence from God, thus needing only science for redemption. Hope is a strong motivation for people, Benedict argues, yet when humans have achieved all of what they hoped, it will become apparent “that only something infinite will suffice” (No. 30). Material hopes do not satisfy human hope, yet the modern world “has developed the hope of creating a perfect world that, thanks to scientific
knowledge and to scientifically based politics, seemed to be achievable” (No. 30). The hurried industrialisation in the Western world and the hasty and ignorant environmental degradation, pollution, deforestation, and thoughtless disposal of toxic wastes, was motivated by the belief of creating a perfect world through only science and technology, has resulted in the environmental crisis as we know it. All because of humanity’s desire to acquire the kingdom of God on earth and the false belief that human salvation can be achieved through science. But that was then, and society now is facing the harsh realities and consequences of these beliefs. Progress and development is inevitable, and Benedict does not require a global stand still in order to protect the creation. He does require, however, that modern society only develop and progress under two conditions: the protection of human dignity and human rights, and that all progress and developmental decisions made first consider their environmental impact. Benedict’s Caritas in Veritate addresses these exact issues and explicitly handles them in regards to the environment.

Caritas In Veritate

In 2009, Benedict promulgated his last encyclical Caritas in Veritate, which contains an entire chapter on “The Development of People Rights and Duties to the Environment” (No. 43–52). Caritas in Veritate will be explored in close detail as to illustrate the environmental views of Benedict. Caritas in Veritate begins by explaining that charity and truth intersect with authentic development. Benedict claims that Populorum Progressio “deserves to be considered ‘the Rerum Novarum of the present age’, shedding light upon humanity’s journey towards unity” (No. 8). Caritas in Veritate is a sweeping reaffirmation of Paul VI’s teaching on authentic human development.
Benedict mentions a variety of environmental issues in this encyclical, always making clear that the natural world must be preserved for the sake of humanity, not the other way around.

*Caritas in Veritate* claims that truth needs to be rediscovered in charity and that charity “needs to be understood, confirmed and practised in the light of truth” (No. 2). This supports the idea that charity is “enlightened by truth” and provides “credibility to truth, demonstrating its persuasive and authenticating power in the practical setting of social living” (No. 2). Rediscovering this link is vital for modern society since truth has become socially and culturally relative. Benedict believes that this close link between truth and charity will facilitate charity as an “authentic expression of humanity” (No. 3), for truth prevents charity from subjectivism. Two very important points are raised at the very start of this important encyclical when it comes to separating truth from charity. First, Benedict is acutely aware that truth is compromised by relativism, for it denies any universal truths. Second, charity risks becoming subjective when truth is relativised, because charity no longer has a universal truth. This is particularly troublesome for Benedict when it comes to authentic development, as it requires an “ethical interaction of conscience” (No. 9). *Caritas in Veritate* establishes a human element in authentic development. “Fidelity to man requires *fidelity to the truth*, which alone is the *guarantee of freedom* (cf. Jn 8:32) and of the *possibility of integral human development*” (No. 9).

This argument justifies the role of the Church in public affairs and authorises the Church’s involvement in development, which arguably is a secular or “state” concern. The many variables of humans and truth within authentic development, according to Benedict, require that the Church be more involved in the public sphere.
Benedict credits *Populorum Progressio*’s integral human development and argues that the Church has a perquisite to protect it, since the Church should be proactive and must not be reduced to purely charitable activities alone. The Church should support authentic human development, as it “concerns the whole of the person in every single dimension” (No. 11). For Benedict, authentic human development “requires a transcendent vision of the person” (No. 11). He believes that any development without God, either fails or “falls into the trap of thinking [humans] can bring about [their] own salvation”, which results in a “dehumanized form of development” (No. 11). There can be “no true humanism but that which is open to the Absolute, and is conscious of a vocation which gives human life its true meaning” (No. 16). *Caritas in Veritate* argues authentic human development must be human oriented and that it must be open to God as the Absolute. Moreover, authentic human development must be seen as a vocation. This assertion in *Caritas in Veritate* solidifies the Church’s imperative for a development this is authentic and human centred.

*Caritas in Veritate* believes that given globalisation, and since wealth is growing in absolute terms, “inequalities are on the increase” (No. 21). Benedict believes that without the Church’s influence of charity and truth, the world would face “unprecedented damage and create new divisions within the human family” (No. 33). The solution to the increase of global inequality and the divide within the universal human family rests on authentic human development. Benedict asserts that true authentic human development and the “broadening [of] our concept of reason” will promote social equality and will ensure a social and economic improvement for the short and long term development (No. 31). For Benedict, development has an extremely important role for the universal human
family. Development should not be only the Church’s concern. It must be the concern of the entire human population, since it involves and affects them directly and indirectly.

Benedict believes that development must be ethically grounded and cannot be separated from the whole of humanity’s best interest. He reiterates that the “primary capital to be safeguarded and valued is... the human person in his or her integrity” (No. 25). Benedict supported this opinion when discussing the underdeveloped or still developing nations and their universal right to access of food and water (No. 27). Caritas in Veritate reasons that developing nations typically have higher rates of poverty and hunger, and a distinctly Catholic priority is to feed the hungry and help the poor (No. 25).

Nevertheless, authentic human development has been negatively impacted by a number of variables. Benedict argued that “the unregulated exploitation of the earth’s resources” has a “decisive impact upon the present and future good of humanity” (No. 21). This indicates Benedict’s awareness of the negative impacts of environmental degradation arguably believes has already had on developing nations. Another point raised in Caritas in Veritate is in reference to the developed, rich, nations and their “excessive zeal for protecting knowledge through an unduly rigid assertion of the right to intellectual property, especially in the field of health care” (No. 22). These points support Benedict’s argument that development is hindered not only by the lack of ethical motivation, but also because of environmental degradation and the lack of solidarity between nations, which is marked by the continuing divide between the rich and the poor.

Benedict’s understanding of authentic human development, although not directly about the environment, is based on a number of Catholic environmental teachings. The pre-eminence of humans need to be considered in every aspect of development, which
reveals the Catholic position on anthropocentrism. When Benedict mentions the exploitation of the earth’s resources, the environmental teaching of intergenerational responsibility emerges. Lastly, when Benedict discusses the growing disparities between nations, the teaching on the equal distribution of resources is revealed. In this particular case, these resources are hoarded under the guise of intellectual property, which excuses developed richer nations to withhold practical knowledge, in this case health care, for their sole personal benefit and gain. Before the designated chapter in Caritas in Veritate on the environment and development, Benedict uses Catholic environmental teachings. This indicates that these teachings have become an integral part to the issues of the modern world for Benedict and the Church.

Benedict resumes his debate on the Church and state when discussing the market. Caritas in Veritate resumes its position that the economy must be morally grounded and that humans must always remain at the forefront of all decision making. According to Benedict, “without internal forms of solidarity and mutual trust, the market cannot completely fulfil its proper economic function” (No. 35). An economy that promotes solidarity and mutual trust, contrasts with that of a consumerist market. The endorsement of this economy supports the Catholic environmental teaching of anti-consumerism. Benedict believes that on a sliding scale everyone has a responsibility for global solidarity, which protects the common good of all. It is evident that Benedict believes that a unified effort for bettering the human condition through the practice of solidarity, the common good, and the authentic development of all people, will be safeguarded.

The chapter devoted explicitly to the environment and the development of people involves not only the rights of people, but also their duties. This indicates that this
chapter assumes a more practical tone and will help to guide and provide solutions.

Benedict begins this section of *Caritas in Veritate* by stating that solidarity requires a duty and that “people today would claim that they owe nothing to anyone, except themselves” (No. 43). Benedict explains that this prioritisation of personal rights results in individuals taking responsibility for their own development, while ignoring the authentic development of their fellow men and women. Benedict believes that there is a need for a “renewed reflection on how *rights presupposed duties*” (No. 43). He depicts the elementary problems with this by explaining that the claim of the “right to excess” in richer developed countries starkly contrasts that of the rights of those in poorer developing countries who struggle for food and drinkable water. Such a stark comparison between rights indicates that there is a missing link between rights and duties today.

*Caritas in Veritate* explains that individual rights can “run wild” and risk escalating to indiscriminate for “[a]n overemphasis on rights leads to a disregard for duties” (No. 43). Benedict states that when duties remain at the forefront, then the “anthropological and ethical framework of which rights are a part” will be protected (No. 43). Authentic human development risks being overrun by individual rights, since many governments have lost “sight of the objectivity and ‘inviolability’ of rights” (No. 43). Benedict maintains that responsible duties should always supersede individual rights.

Benedict addresses a problem about the rights and duties of both developed and developing countries when it comes to population control. For Benedict, “[m]orally responsible openness to life represents a rich social and economic resource” (No. 44). *Caritas in Veritate* rejects the notion that population increase is the primary cause of underdevelopment. Instead, Benedict offers that responsible procreation as the “positive
contribution to make to integral human development” (No. 44). Benedict’s position on procreation and sexuality rejects governments that “regulate it through strategies of mandatory birth control” (No. 44). Benedict is silent, however, regarding voluntary means of birth control, such as the rhythm method and abstinence. This is parallel to the established Catholic environmental teaching of anti-population control. Benedict believes that governments are “called to enact policies promoting the centrality and the integrity of the family” (No. 44). This statement reiterates Benedict’s stances on anti-population control as well the anthropocentrism of humanity in all decisions made. Many environmentalists, secular, and religious, struggle with Benedict’s belief that an increase of population growth is not the fundamental cause for underdevelopment. Undoubtedly there is a correlation of an increase in population with an increased demand for food, water, and energies. This inevitably results, however, in further damage to the environment and an increase in the consumption of natural resources. This paradox of population control and birth control appeared earlier in John Paul II’s writings and unsurprisingly has reappeared again in Benedict’s work. While anti-population control seems to go against the grain of environmental protection, Benedict proposes that the shared global responsibility and duty for the human family will protect human dignity and their procreation rights, as well as help curb the environmental crisis.

*Caritas in Veritate* argues that in order for economies and governments to function, they must be ethical, and these ethics are human-centred. Benedict supports this argument through the belief that people are created in the image of God, “a datum which gives rise to the inviolable dignity of the human person and the transcendent value of natural moral norms” (No. 45). *Caritas in Veritate* affirms that the economy should
function as an ethical insurance of human dignity. Benedict explains this on a more practical level when discussing the distinctions between profit and non-profit businesses and the important role of development programs. He advocates for the strengthening of businesses, particularly in nations “that are excluded or marginalized from the influential circles of the global economy” (No. 47). Referring back to the balance between rights and duties as discussed earlier, Benedict believes that there is an important role for developing nations to recognise their rights as well as practice their own duties. This cannot be something that is simply imposed on them by outside forces. Developing nations must be involved in order to “move ahead with projects based on subsidiarity” (No. 47). Benedict believes that this will not only affirm their rights, but it will stipulate their corresponding duties. *Caritas in Veritate* quotes *Populorum Progressio* on this matter, reiterating that humans “have the prime responsibility to work for their own development. But they will not bring about this in isolation” (No. 47). Benedict believes that this is possible internationally, but only “through the solidarity of their presence, supervision, training and respect” (No. 47). *Caritas in Veritate* advocates for the practice of solidarity and subsidiarity for national and international entities that support the development of those less advantaged. Through this form of practice – where morality, human centeredness, solidarity, and subsidiarity are the motivating factors – those who receive aid will no longer become “subordinate to the aid-givers” (No. 47). Benedict is hopeful that “all international agencies and non-governmental organizations will commit themselves to complete transparency” (No. 47). This desire for complete transparency with solidarity and subsidiarity is idealistic, yet it provides insight to Benedict’s solution to authentic human development, both equitably and globally.
The following sections of this chapter are more environmentally oriented and provide a clearer understanding of Benedict’s environmentalism. Benedict believes that the creation is a gift from God to everyone and that with this gift comes a responsibility. *Caritas in Veritate* explains that environmental responsibility, therefore, must be towards the poor and future generations and that humans must respect the inherent balance of creation. “Nature speaks to us of the Creator (cf. Rom 1:20) and his love for humanity”, which means that nature is a vocation (No. 48), according to Benedict. Since nature is a gift from God, the environment is at our disposal but is not “a heap of scattered refuse” (No. 48). *Caritas in Veritate* establishes the importance of nature and the environment when discussing the important role of development for humans. Benedict argues “to view nature as something more important than the human person,” denies any authentic human development; however, Benedict also argues that humanity must also reject the reverse view that seeks complete dominion of nature and the environment (No. 48). *Caritas in Veritate* rejects the latter view of nature believing that the environment “is a wondrous work of the Creator containing a “grammar” which sets forth ends and criteria for its wise use, not its reckless exploitation” (No. 48). Benedict’s description of nature as “grammar,” as the syntax of God’s wisdom, institutes that responsible use of nature respects God and gives reason for the wise use of nature. It is clear that Benedict’s environmental views are closely tied to God and God’s relationship with humans. Viewing nature, as “a collection of contingent data” does not only damage the environment, it “fails to respect human nature itself” (No. 48). Benedict links authentic human development with environmental care and states that it must be “marked by solidarity and inter-generational justice” (No. 48). *Caritas in Veritate* establishes that
God requires respect for the creation and disrespect of the creation disrespects human nature. Benedict asserts that since the earth is a gift from God and is meant for everyone’s benefit, it must be used wisely. God’s gift, however, comes with the responsibility to care for the creation and ensure that this gift be available to not only the present population, but with future generations.

Benedict is acutely aware that the environmental crisis involves a wide-range of issues, one of which is the energy problem. The growing discrepancy between developing and developed nations and non-renewable energy resources is a serious problem that is addressed in detail in *Caritas in Veritate*. Benedict explains that the hoarding of non-renewable energy resources by the affluent nations and companies “represents a grave obstacle to development in poor countries” (No. 49). Not only is it unfair to hoard resources and equally unfair to stunt development in other counties, but the “stockpiling of natural resources… gives rise to exploitation and frequent conflicts between and within nations” (No. 49). In order to curb this immoral hoarding behaviour, *Caritas in Veritate* proposes that all international communities have a duty to control the non-renewable energy resources that involves poorer nations in the process of planning for the future together. This illustrates the urgent and ethical necessity for an improved solidarity between developing and developed nations. “The technologically advanced societies can and must lower their domestic energy consumption,” according to Benedict, “either through an evolution in manufacturing methods or through greater ecological sensitivity among their citizens” (No. 49). *Caritas in Veritate* calls for a global redistribution of non-renewable energy resources to those who are in need. Benedict rejects that idea that nations be relegated to a fate “left in the hands of whoever is first to claim the spoils, or
whoever is able to prevail over the rest” (No. 49). Ultimately, *Caritas in Veritate* situates the weight of this moral issue not only on the responsibility of those for the future, but also on “the many young people in the poorer nations, who ‘ask to assume their active part in the construction of a better world’” (No. 49). This, for Benedict, is a serious concern. Given the proactive nature of Generation Y-ers who wish to assume their environmental responsibilities, but are unable to do so because of the inactive and selfish attitude of those nations that do not take responsibility for their actions, and refuse to share with others their non-renewable natural energy resources.

Benedict is hopeful, however, that people will change their behaviours and take a proactive stance, since environmental responsibility is universal. He believes responsible environmental stewardship can still protect and cultivate nature through alternative means “with the assistance of advanced technologies… can worthily accommodate and feed the world’s population” (No. 50). This statement stands apart from other environmental statements as well as other Popes’, as it assumes that “[o]n this earth there is room for everyone” (No. 50). In the introduction of this thesis, the claim was made that Benedict’s environmental views overlap with certain environmental movements that some “regard as an attack on capitalism and limited government, [while] under the guise of hype about global warming” (Allen, “Eco-Skepts” 1). It is reasonable that some might perceive Benedict’s environmental views as an attack on capitalism and limited government, but they have overlooked why Benedict’s environmentalism requires such changes. Since Benedict explicitly rejects all population control, and as the world’s population increases and natural resources become scarce, then of course Benedict would propose a radical change with capitalism and government. Accommodating the needs of a growing
population is an imperative for Benedict since “the entire human family must find the resources to live with dignity” which can be achieved “through hard work and creativity” (No. 50). Catholicism’s overt Pro-Life stance, whether it’s anti-abortion or protecting the unborn of tomorrow, derives from the belief in the inherent nature of human dignity.

After denouncing population control as a means to tackle the environmental crisis, *Caritas in Veritate* explains the role and duties for future generations. The concept of *intergenerational responsibility* is not new, and it is already established as one of the Catholic environmental teachings. Benedict states that society has a duty to ensure the earth future generations and that we must guarantee the future generations “can worthily inhabit it and continue to cultivate it” (No. 50). Benedict proposes that all decisions be made jointly and responsibly “aimed at strengthening that covenant between human beings and the environment, which should mirror the creative love of God, from whom we come and towards whom we are journeying” (No. 50). This reaffirms the Catholic environmental teachings on *intergenerational responsibility* and that it is important to Benedict’s environmental views. Benedict’s vision of *intergenerational responsibility* is grounded in his belief in God and his belief in God’s relationship with humans and the creation. According to *Caritas in Veritate*, it is “incumbent upon the competent authorities” to try everything possible as to ensure the “economic and social costs of using up shared environmental resources” (No. 50). He also believes that these economic and social costs must not only be transparent, but those who incurred them must be accountable, not other countries and not future generations. *Caritas in Veritate* concludes this argument by explaining that all international leaders are obliged to protect the environment, natural resources, and the climate. This must be done with a sense of
solidarity to the weakest of countries and they must accept that efficiency can never be
“value-free” (No. 50). Benedict validates the Catholic environmental teaching of
*intergenerational responsibility* by consigning the accountability to those responsible for
the environmental crisis and not to be passed on to future generations or other countries.

Benedict’s environmental stance is set apart from other environmentalists because
of the primacy Benedict places on humans. When it comes to the environment,
Benedict’s employs the term “human ecology,” which originally was John Paul’s.
Benedict develops the concept of “human ecology” to such an extent that it almost
becomes uniquely his. Human ecology, as explained in *Caritas in Veritate*, is how
“*humanity treats the environment influences the way it treats itself, and vice versa*” (No.
51). Benedict believes the way humans treat other humans, mirrors the way they would
treat the environment, and the reverse, the way that humans treat the environment reflects
the way that humans would treat other humans. Benedict believed they are mutually
exclusive -- “Every violation of solidarity and civic friendship harms the environment,
just as environmental deterioration in turn upsets relations in society” (No. 51). Benedict
is able to explain the applicability of a human ecology through the importance of
ensuring peace in times of war. He asserts that natural resources are squandered in
wartime, and that peace amongst people in turn protects nature. “The hoarding of
resources, especially water, can generate serious conflicts among the peoples involved”
(No. 51). Environmental destruction and misuse is linked to the cause of conflict and war.
This is a powerful statement. While this correlation is not new, it remains pertinent as it
highlights the severity the environmental crisis has on a peaceful existence for humanity.
The correct use of natural resources protects humanity and the environment since
“deterioration of nature is in fact closely connected to the culture that shapes human coexistence” (No. 51). When human ecology is respected nature ecology will profit, however, Benedict believes that the “overall moral tenor of society” must change if humanity is to attain such a symbiosis between human ecology with nature ecology.

*Caritas in Veritate’s* concern is not limited to the correct balance of human ecology and nature ecology, for Benedict also addresses it within the larger context of the decline of morality in the modern world. Benedict stresses, when there is a lack of respect for life “the conscience of society ends up losing the concept of human ecology and, along with it, that of environmental ecology” (No. 51). Environmental responsibility is so tightly bound to duty and respect of humans that it would be hypocritical to protect the environment while ignoring humans. There is a “contradiction in our mentality and practice today: one which demeans the person, disrupts the environment and damages society” (No. 51) and *Caritas in Veritate* maintains that it must be corrected. Like John Paul, Benedict calls for a new life-style. *Caritas in Veritate* provides a detailed and hands-on approach to Benedict’s proposed new life-style. First, this new life-style requires that the Church assume environmental responsibility and “must assert this responsibility in the public sphere” (No. 51). The Church’s ultimate goal is not just environmental protection because it is a gift from God to all of humanity. Instead the Church must “above all protect mankind from self-destruction” since this, Benedict asserts, is the vitality of human ecology.

*Caritas in Veritate* continues the discussion of authentic human development and explains that the development of people relies “on a recognition that the human race is a single family” (No. 53). Benedict’s vision of one human family establishes the
interconnected responsibility that each person has towards the other, which is critical for authentic human development. *Caritas in Veritate* discusses the problems that arise when this perception of a human family is rejected and even subjected to relativism. Some share Benedict’s vision of one human family, while others “do not oblige men and women to live in communion” and promote a wellbeing that is “limited to the gratification of psychological desires” (No. 55). Benedict rejects syncretism, however, he supports religions and cultures that are based on human dignity, charity, and truth.

The globalisation of the modern world has the potential to put into practice the recognition of the human race as one family, but it also risks the dangers of a universal tyrannical power. Benedict proposes that subsidiarity is “particularly well-suited to managing globalization and directing it towards authentic human development” (No. 57). He argues it evokes a “fraternal cooperation between believers and non-believers in their shared commitment to working for justice and peace of the human family,” which cultivates freedom through responsibility (No. 57).

The central message in *Caritas in Veritate* encyclical is that truth and charity are critical for an authentic human development and humanity can, and must, work together for the benefit and betterment of the whole world. The promotion, practice, and protection of authentic human development will not only ensure the development of individuals, but that of all people. Ultimately for Benedict, authentic human development is of the whole person and is propelled through the love, hope, and truth of God.

These three encyclicals reveal Benedict’s philosophical and theological scholarship on Christianity, more specifically Catholicism. Benedict, as a traditional Catholic, believed that modernity has strained the nonpareil relationship that is found
between God and humans. For this reason, his environmental views in these encyclicals may not be as obvious than in his other works. Benedict’s reign as Pope was only eight years, yet during his papacy he continually voiced his environmental concerns.
This thesis has discovered that the essence of Benedict’s environmental ethics lies in the belief that the creation is a gift from God and of the pre-eminence of humans in creation. His environmental concerns are global peace, authentic human development, the discrepancy of natural and energy recourses between developed and developing nations, and while science and technology have the ability to truly help humanity and address the environmental crisis, the selfish misuse of them can ultimately destroy the earth and all of humankind. Benedict’s solution to the environmental crisis is that of solidarity and subsidiarity, on a micro and macro scale, and that a universal acceptance and application of human ecology will eliminate modern societies tendency for relativism.

Creation as a Gift

Benedict attended to concerns similar to, if not the same as, White’s criticisms of Christianity’s role with the earth, and recognises that Christianity has been accused of demythologising nature. Ratzinger argues that under the guise of progress, which only thinks and cares about progress, nature has been reduced to a utilitarian object explicitly for human control and exploitation. (Beginning 33-34). Ratzinger agrees with White in that the ecological solution cannot only be technological and scientific, instead it must be found in God’s instructions to humankind, “supposed to look after the world as God’s creation, and to do so in accordance with the rhythms and the logic of creation”
Ratzinger then and Benedict now, believe that the solution to this crisis can be found in Christian theology, through re-evaluating God’s intension for humanity and the preservation of creation as a gift.

The Pre-eminence of Humans and Equal Resource Distribution

Benedict agrees with the restorations to the Berlin mandate and argues 
“industrializing countries are not morally free to repeat the past errors of others, by recklessly continuing to damage the environment” (“Ecumenical Patriarch” 2007). Benedict believes that developed countries must share their “clean technologies” with others and must curb their “proliferation of pollution” (“Ecumenical Patriarch” 2007) with those nations that are in the earlier stages of industrial development. It is clear that Benedict recognises the many different imbalances that are found between developed and developing countries.

In his 2009 Message for World Day of Peace, Benedict addresses these developmental inequities, noting that “[t]he gap between rich and poor has become more marked” (cf. John Paul, “If You Want Peace” 1993 No. 1). This exemplifies his concern with the discrepancies between developed and developing nations and places Benedict’s environmental concern to a broader context. Benedict argues that economic imbalances also infringe upon “the inalienable rights and dignity of every human person,” especially when a population’s needs are overlooked and “the goods of the earth are not given

37. This term was first used in the 1995 “Berlin mandate” to support the G-77 group, which now consists of 132 developing nations. In 1997, the Kyoto Protocol restored the Berlin mandate according to the Clean Development Mechanism. The protocol calls for developing nations to be held accountable for their emissions, but only later in their development.
adequate protection” (“Mr Jacques Diouf” 2010). The environmental crisis is bound to social and economic justice, and any economic or social issue that arises must never be relativised. Benedict believes that this would negatively impact human dignity and violates the basic human right to food, water, and life.

Benedict’s Unique Environmentalism: Human and Peace Ecology

The 2010 World Day of Peace Message, “If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation,” strikes at the heart of Benedict’s environmental views. The title of this message for Benedict reveals how environmental conservation and preservation is essential for the peaceful coexistence of humankind. Acts of war and terrorism definitely threaten world peace, yet for Benedict the neglect and misuse of the environment’s natural good is “no less troubling” (No.1). Benedict urges humanity to renew the “covenant between human beings and the environment, which should mirror the creative love of God, from whom we come and towards whom we are journeying” (“The Human Family” 2008, No. 7). Benedict argues that the earth is God’s gift to all of humanity and entails a shared responsibility, especially the poor and future generations (No. 2) and that the environmental crisis is a “wide-ranging social problem which concerns the entire human family” (No. 3). The questions that Benedict openly asks point to his struggle with relativism and the environmental crisis.38 These questions demonstrate that aspects of the environmental crisis can in no way be subjected to relativism. “All these are issues with a profound impact on the exercise of human rights, such as the right to life, food, health

38. See Benedict, “If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation” 2010 No. 4, for full quote.
and development” (No. 4). For Benedict, the creation “is not the product of any necessity whatsoever, nor of blind fate or chance” (No. 6). Benedict argues for governments, corporations to work together and in order to “combat this phenomenon, economic activity needs to consider the fact that ‘every economic decision has a moral consequence’ and thus show increased respect for the environment” (No. 7). In order to protect the environment, Benedict argues “there is a need to act in accordance with clearly-defined rules, also from the juridical and economic standpoint, while at the same time taking into due account the solidarity we owe to those living in the poorer areas of our world and to future generations” (No. 7). The proposal for a universal rule, inspired by the distinction between right and wrong treatment of the environment, seems impossible because they would be exhaustedly debated given the practice of relativism today. Benedict states that “[t]he ecological crisis shows the urgency of a solidarity which embraces time and space” (No. 8) and that it can only be “accomplished more easily if self-interest played a lesser role in the granting of aid and the sharing of knowledge and cleaner technology” (No. 8). He is speaking directly to developed nations with advanced technologies and sciences for creating alternative and clean energies.39 Development for the other nations must work according to the authentic human development plan, which is centred on the human person and promotes the sharing of common goods with virtue that “what needs to be done today in view of what might happen tomorrow” (No 9).

Global solidarity is a fundamental attitude, which will protect the creation, since it promotes the international management of the earth’s resources and better establishes the

39. The ecological crisis offers an historic opportunity to develop a common plan of action aimed at orienting the model of global development towards greater respect for creation and for an integral human development inspired by the values proper to charity in truth (No. 9).
link between environmental degradation and integral human development. For Benedict, they are inseparable because “the integral development of individuals necessarily entails a joint effort for the development of humanity as a whole” (No. 10). Benedict believes that attention and credit needs to be direct to those who are exploring alternative energies, waste disposal, forest management, and small family own farms. Also the correlation between fighting poverty and climate change needs to be further explored through the international commitment for human benefit, both short and long term. Benedict states that moving past the consumerist mentality will help agriculture and industrial product to better respect the environment. “The ecological problem must be dealt with not only because of the chilling prospects of environmental degradation on the horizon; the real motivation must be the quest for authentic world-view solidarity inspired by the values of charity, justice and the common good” (No. 10). The use and need of technology is vital for this, but it must “reinforce the covenant between human beings and the environment” that mirror’s God’s creative love (CV No. 69).

Non-governmental and civil social organisations that spread ecological responsibility are commendable, yet Benedict asserts that environmental responsibility “should be ever more deeply anchored in respect for ‘human ecology’” (No. 11). This responsibility is must be on a global level and cannot be left to selfish and nationalistic interests, since environmental damages affect the whole world. Like the relationship found between humans the environment, so should states, nations, and social groups be propelled by respect and inspired by “charity in truth” (No. 11). With this the Church as a duty towards teaching responsibility towards the creation, particularly on the public sphere, so to protect God’s gift of the creation, water, and air. Benedict explains that ones
“duties towards the environment flow from our duties towards the person, considered both individually and in relation to others” (No. 12). This duty derives from the natural moral law, a patrimony of values, and reaffirms “the inviolability of human life at every stage in every condition” (CV No. 28, No. 51, No. 61).

People know peace and tranquillity when they experience the harmony of nature, but this must not be mistaken with the absolutising of nature and making nature more important than humans. Benedict argues that the “supposedly egalitarian vision of the ‘dignity’ of all living creature” not only abolishes the central and uniqueness of humans in the creation, but it also opens “the way to a new pantheism tinged with neo-paganism” making the salvation of humans only through nature (No. 13). Equally bad for Benedict, however, is the absolutising of “technology and human power” since it “results in a grave assault not only on nature, but also on human dignity itself” (CV No. 70). This is why Benedict strongly supports and advocates for “human ecology” to be the appropriate and balanced solution for tackling the many complications of the environmental crisis.

Benedict makes the connection between peace and environmental protection writing that “education for peace must increasingly begin with far-reaching decisions” by everyone on all levels, since everyone is “responsible for the protection and care of the environment. This responsibility knows no boundaries” (No. 11). Nuclear weapons threaten human and environmental life present and future. Benedict states that there is a mandatory duty and commitment that everyone world wide must protect the environment in order to have peace in the world and to try and hand a better future and world to future generations. He asserts, “the protection of creation and peacemaking are profoundly
linked” and that humanity must “take to heart the urgent appeal: If you want to cultivate peace, protect creation” (No. 14).

Benedict’s Environmentalism in Action

When elected as Pope in 2005, Benedict began to publically address the environmental crisis. His writings did not and call for creation care did not result in his being labelled the “Green Pope” by the local Italian newspapers – it was his actions.

Benedict realises that the environmental crisis is both a religious and secular imperative for the modern world. Benedict recognises that his writings and rhetoric on the environmental crisis alone will not change environmental behaviour; therefore, he decided to lead by example. “Benedict’s lasting legacies might be how he steered the global debate over climate change” (“How Green” Stone). When Benedict first became Pope, Benedict “authorized the Vatican’s bank to purchase carbon credits by funding a Hungarian forest that would make the Catholic city-state the only country fully carbon neutral” (N. pag.). According to Koenig-Bricker, Benedict has taken significant strides in making the Vatican more ecological friendly and became the first carbon-neutral country through the combination of carbon credits and personal renewable energies. In 2007, Benedict was able to get the Vatican to install over 2,400 solar panels on top of the Paul VI auditorium. These solar panels now cool, heat, and provide light for the 6,000 seats in the auditorium. Any surplus power, or when the auditorium is not being used, is rerouted and powers the rest of the Vatican’s power network. Koenig-Bricker estimates that these solar panels alone convert 300,000 kilowatt-hours of power per year, which is believed to significantly reduce the Vatican’s CO2 emissions. It is estimated that since “the
installation of the solar panels, the Vatican has saved 89.4 tones of oil” per year (Machica). Additionally, solar panels were installed above the Vatican’s employee cafeteria, which are estimated to provide between 60–70% of the building’s power.

Furthermore, during his papacy, Benedict “unveiled a new hybrid Popemobile that would be partially electric” (“How Green” Stone).

These environmentally friendly changes that Benedict has initiated at the Vatican demonstrate seriousness regarding environmental responsibility. His environmental action embodies practicing what you preach. Benedict also speaks out to his followers and implements creative, yet sometimes controversial, ways to lessen the individual’s negative environmental impact. During one event, when hundreds of lay Catholics had a two day pilgrimage and camp-out at the Vatican, Benedict asked that each person not only recycle but that they refrain from showering during their pilgrimage, as to try and off set their carbon footprint from traveling to the Vatican. Naturally this request received mixed reviews from being absolutely absurd to being innovative and progressive.

Benedict’s environmental action has led the Vatican to continue with these “green projects.” The Vatican engineer, Mauro Villarini, has a list of environmentally friendly changes to make both to the Vatican as well as papal estates outside of the Vatican. Villarini has plans for a papal estate north of Rome, the Castel Gandolfo. He is considering the installation of small windmills and treatment plants, which break down water waste products. Villarini is also considering installing a solar system for the 740 acres of Santa Maria di Galeria, which is the Vatican Radio’s official transmission centre. It is the Vatican’s plan to have sufficient renewable energies by 2020, which can make up for exactly 20% of all of their energy needs.
In 2005, Bishop Giampaolo Crepaldi structured the “ten commandments” for the environment for a conference on ethics and the environment. Bishop Crepaldi was able to extract the main points from a chapter on “The Environment” in John Paul II’s *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (2004), and summarize them into ten points (see Appendix II). Though these environmental “ten commandments” are not originally Benedict’s but a collection of previous papal works, it still demonstrates other Catholic responses, interpretations, and views regarding the environmental issue. Benedict not only supports these “ten commandments for the environment,” but he endorses their application today.

Benedict wrote in *Faith and the Future* that difficulties in the relationship between religion and science, faith and evolution, start with Genesis.

> [H]ow the world came to be, is in direct contradiction of what we know today about the origins of the universe; and even if the word has gotten around that these passages in the bible are not means to be a textbook of natural science, and so not to be taken as a literal description of how the universe came to be, still and uneasy feeling remains. (15-16)

While Benedict accepts science, he maintains that it needs ethics because technology can help humanity, but there is a need for moral guidance especially when it comes to life issues and the environment. Ethics for science, technology, and on the environment help society better understand and wrestle with the social aspects that are associated with these subjects.

**Relativism and the Environment**

This thesis argues that Benedict’s position on the environmental crisis is inextricably tied to his struggles with relativism. Benedict recognises there are
appropriate venues for relativism, such as a liberal democracy, however certain issues (moral or ethical ones) and certain organizations (such as the U.N.) that must never be ambivalent with concerns for human life. Ethical relativism in the modern world maintains that what is right or wrong, good or bad, can never be absolute but is always relative or variable. Any shared right or good not only varies between society and culture but also to the individual, and even they will be relative to time and place. This is a problem for Benedict because he believes God’s message is an absolute truth, but also because the environmental crisis, as a moral issue, is being relativised and human rights and human dignity, which also have absolute value, have increasingly being subjected to relativism. The link between these elements is that the environmental crisis poses great threat to human dignity and human rights, but because human rights and human dignity have been relativised the environmental crisis has been allowed to reach the point that it has. The environmental crisis is also relativised consequently threatens human existence, which in turn relativises human dignity and human rights.

Human dignity and human rights are victims to relativism because any common ethic and shared responsibility towards others has been totally stripped down to subjectivism. The environmental crisis requires the collaboration of persons and nations to agree on an objective truth regarding good vs. bad treatment of the earth and its inhabitants, and an objective truth on the right or wrong way to ensure human dignity and human rights. “[W]henever nature, and human beings in particular, are seen merely as products of change or evolutionary determinism, our overall sense of responsibility wanes” (CV No. 48). Benedict believes that the modern world has relativised almost everything, so with regards to threat of the environmental crisis and the negative affects it
has on human life, he proposes the concept of human ecology. Through the understanding and acceptance of human ecology, the environmental crisis, human dignity, and human rights will no longer be subjected to relativism.

Benedict is opposed to those who believe that “secularism is benign” (Rowland, Benedict 159). A unity built only on practice lacks foundation and Benedict claims that secularism is just the latest of the world modern ideologies, which destroy human freedom. According to Cavanaugh, “post-modernity … represent[s] salvation through the globalization of capital and universal access to commodities” (Cavanaugh 5). Secularism is a political theology that provides a logical infrastructure for the culture of death – a term coined by John Paul. This identification of the culture of death was directed specifically at liberal democracy, since he believed that it caters to the separation of freedom from the truth. This issue is addressed in John Paul’s encyclical in which he explains that moral conscience, “both individual and social, is today subjected, also as a result of the penetrating influence of the media, to an extremely serious and mortal danger: that of confusion between good and evil, precisely in relation to the fundamental right to life” (EV No. 24). John Paul was all too aware of the dangers of the growing acceptance and the false application of relative and rationalized morality. He believed that life issues must not lost in the confusion between good and evil.

The problem of secularism is that society accepts the continued blurring of good and bad not only when it comes to matters of life or death, but also that is separates man further from the truth through the shallow promises of the virtues of freedom. For Benedict, as well as John Paul, the belief in a purely secular rationality is not only false, but it also fails to teach truth, and to “liberate and incite love” (Rowland, Benedict 160).
Benedict believes salvation can only come through Jesus Christ and that, “a humanism which excludes God is an inhuman humanism” (*CV* No. 78).

In his works on secularism, human rights, and the public role of the Church we can see some of the best example of Benedict’s attempts to confront relativism. For example, in an address that he gave to the United Nations in 2008, Benedict discusses relativism and the practice of a universal “common good.” He spoke to the U.N. Members of the General Assembly about the pertinent role they have in “harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment of [the] common ends” of peace (“Meeting With the Members” 2008). Benedict regards the U.N. to be “a moral center where all the nations of the world feel at home and [can] develop a shared awareness of being” (“Meeting With the Members” 2008). In Benedict’s view, the U.N. is an organization structured to uphold a universally shared interest that ensures peace, and that it pursues the common good for *all* human beings. Benedict recognises that such efforts will require that all international leaders think, work and act together, and promote solidarity with the nations that are most in need. Not everyone agrees, however, with Benedict’s position on such a universal morality. Ruth Fulton Benedict’s book, *Patterns of Culture*, explains “cultural relativism” and how morals invariably will be relative to each culture. R. F. Benedict believes that objective morality cannot exist without imposing a type of ethnocentrism (45).

Nevertheless, when the U.N. is faced with questions of “security, development goals, reduction of local and global inequalities, protection of the environment, of resources and of the climate” (“Meeting With the Members” 2008), Benedict believes they must counter balance all decisions made with an objective goal that ensures the *common good* for all -- “human life” decisions should not be relativised.
Benedict’s connection of relativism and the environment begins to surface when discussing the role of the United Nations in the modern world. Typically, the U.N. is needed in times of humanitarian disturbance and when “freedom[s] and human dignity are] grossly violated” (“Meeting With the Members” 2008). Benedict believes that all humans are at the centre of God’s creative plan. When human dignity is at risk and is “yielded to a relativistic conception, according to which the meaning and interpretation of rights could vary and their universality would be denied” (“Meeting With the Members” 2008) the U.N. must act as the moral compass. Benedict argues that relativism must not be allowed to “obscure the fact that not only rights are universal, but so too is the human person, the subject of those rights” (“Meeting With the Members” 2008). In Benedict’s view it is vital, therefore, that the U.N. remain objective when protecting human dignity and the universal right to the common good. Benedict’s address to the United Nations highlights why relativism has no role when concerned with human rights. A significant part of Benedict’s concern for the environment is tied into protecting human life and dignity.

Benedict develops the term “human ecology” by highlighting the connection between nature ecology and human ecology. On the World Day of Peace in 2007, Benedict said that the “disregard for the environment always harms human coexistence, and vice versa” (“Human Person” No. 8). Benedict believes that humans are responsible to care for the earth and that the lopsided consumption of “shared environmental resources must be recognized with transparency” (“Safeguarding” 2009). Those responsible must be held accountable and not “future generations” (“Safeguarding” 2009). Such behaviour requires a responsible stewardship of the creation: protecting,
enjoying, and cultivating it while also “finding the resources necessary for everyone to live with dignity” (“Safeguarding” 2009). The environmental crisis is a human life and human dignity issue. Benedict’s desires to preserve the environment from being relativised is connected with his desire to safeguard human dignity from being relativised. Benedict’s concern for the future of humankind and environmental degradation is reciprocal to how the modern world addresses the issues of relativism. This does not, however, reduce his care for the environment to a philosophical debate on relativism and the objective truth: Benedict’s environmental concerns are real.

Benedict believes that relativism has forced a wedge between man and God, which enabled the modern world not to just tolerate, but legitimize environmental deterioration – just as it has led mankind, for example, to tolerate poverty that is found not only in developing nations but also close to home. For Benedict, the environmental crisis is invariably linked to the modern day issue of relativism. The environmental crisis has been allowed to continue and worsen, in Benedict’s view, due to the overpowering influence of relativism in the modern era. When nothing is truly wrong or right, and everything is permitted, few feel inspired or obligated to stand up for the downtrodden – especially when the downtrodden in question is inanimate.
Chapter VIII

Catholic Response to the Environmental Crisis in the United States

The final section of this thesis will assess the ways in which Benedict’s ideas have influenced the environmental views held by Catholics in the United States. In 1991, the U.S. Catholic Bishops jointly issued their first environmental statement “Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social teaching” in response to John Paul’s 1990 “Peace with the Creator, Peace with All of Creation,” which initiated the Catholic environmental movement. The U.S. Catholic Bishops later partnered with National Religious Partnership for the Environment in 2001 and released a second statement “Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good” on the role of lay Catholics with environmental crisis. This statement articulated four guiding principles that the U.S. Bishops relate to the environmental crisis: prudence, protection of the poor, common good, and solidarity. These principles help to shape the worldview of Catholics on many social justice issues. The U.S. Bishops apply these to the environment: using prudence in the face of uncertainty; protecting the vulnerable and poor; striving for the common good of all; and encouraging human solidarity – globally and with future generations (USCCB, “Global” pars. 16-28). It is evident some leaders in the Church have a strong environmental position and have be able to framed the issue in a way that believe is applicable and relatable to lay Catholics.
In the U.S., the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change and its campaign for education and action, called the Catholic Climate Covenant (CCC), is the primary instrument of the Church’s activism on the environmental crisis. The initial coalition was launched in 2006 in order to spread environmental awareness amongst lay Catholics in the U.S. The coalition consisted of members like, Catholic Charities USA, Catholic Relief Services, and the Franciscan Action Network. In 2009, the coalition formed the Catholic Climate Covenant and created a website with the slogan: “Who’s under your carbon footprint?” as its call for environmental justice. The slogan is stamped across a photograph of a child [see Figure 1], most likely from a developing country. This draws the environmental attention to the vulnerable and poor that will suffer from environmental degradation, climate change, and global warming, thus are “under” the footprint. This coalition’s exemplifies their environmental concerns through this image, illustrating their environmental duty to those that are unable to help themselves.

This website, CatholicClimateCovenant.org, offers Catholic teachings, resources, and tools to assist lay Catholics in handling climate change issues. It urges that Catholics take the St. Francis Pledge, committing to take action against climate change. In 2011 the CCC created 24 “Catholic Climate Ambassadors” and their role is to educate lay Catholics on the role of the Church in relation to the environmental crisis. The Catholic Climate Covenant is a prominent example of a Catholic group in the U.S. that plays a

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40. The St. Francis Pledge, “I Pledge to: PRAY and reflect on duty to care for God’s Creation and protect the poor and vulnerable. LEARN and educate others on causes and moral dimensions of climate change. ASSESS how we – as individuals and in our families, parishes and other affiliations – contribute to climate change by our own energy use, consumption, waste, etc. ACT to change our choices and behaviors to reduce the ways we contribute to climate change. ADVOCATE for Catholic principles and priorities in climate change discussions and decisions, especially as they impact those who are poor and vulnerable.”
progressive and active role with the environmental crisis issues. The works by Benedict and John Paul, that address the environmental issues with the strong demand to respect both human dignity and the creation, provides encouragement to U.S. Catholic environmental movements, and offers an authoritative tone on the issue. Despite the positive nature of the Catholic Climate Covenant, it does not represent all U.S. Catholic views concerning the environmental crisis. Two questions arise given this last statement. First, what are U.S. Catholics views regarding the environmental crisis? Second, are papal environmental teachings influencing U.S. Catholics into action?

Catholics in the United States Today

According to the Key Data from Pew Research on U.S. Catholics conducted on February 25, 2013 there are about 75 million Catholics in the U.S. making up just under a quarter of the U.S. population. This poll provided a filter of the frequency of mass attendance, which reported that 41% attended mass at least once a week, another 41% attended mass monthly to a few times a year, and 17% seldom to never, attend mass. When asked about their opinion on Benedict as Pope, it was reported that in 2005, 67% viewed Benedict favourably and in 2013, 74% had a favourable opinion of Benedict – 55% reported that Benedict did a “good or excellent” job at religious relations. When asked what they wanted from the next Pope, there was a split on if he should maintain a traditional position or if he should move in a new direction, 46% responded for a new direction and 51% responded to maintain tradition position. This poll outlines the contemporary U.S. Catholic perception of Benedict and the role of the Vatican.
U.S. Catholics’ Views on the Environmental Crisis

In September 2012, there was public opinion poll conducted by the Centre for International and Security Studies in Maryland (CISSM) that discovered 83% of Catholics would in fact, endorse an international agreement to reduce greenhouse gases (Kull, et al. 12). When asked about the objective or goal for preventing climate change, Catholics responded dividedly: 32% saw it as part of an obligation to protect God’s creation; 44% believed it was important, but not as an obligation towards God’s creation; and one in five Catholics, did not see preventing climate change as an important goal (Kull, et al. 8, 16). This is a very important finding. Self-describing Catholics in the U.S., who share Benedict’s views on the environmental crisis, do not share the same theological environmental framework as Benedict – they do not see the goal for preventing climate change as an obligation toward God’s creation. While this poll suggests that Catholics are in favour of taking action and curbing global emissions, their incentive does not reflect that of Benedict’s environmentalism.

Comparison of other U.S. Religions

Given the argued correlation of the environmental crisis and life-issues, it is fruitful to study the U.S. religious views on abortion, homosexuality, environmental protection, and the government’s role in protecting morality. This analysis will compare the views of Catholics with other affiliations and it will contrast U.S. Catholic opinions on these issues to Benedict’s position, which is fairly evident. The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life conduced a “U.S. Religious Landscape Survey” in June 23, 2008. This survey discovered that, with regards to abortion, 48% of Catholics said it should be
legal in all or most cases and 45% said it should be illegal in most or all cases [see Figure 2 for comparison]. When it comes to the question of homosexuality, 58% of Catholics said it should be accepted by society and 30% said that it should be discouraged by society [see Figure 3 for comparison]. In regards to environmental protection, 32% of Catholics said stricter environmental laws and regulation costs too many jobs and will hurt the economy, while 60% welcomed stricter environmental laws, regulations, and said it was worth the cost [see Figure 4 for comparison]. Lastly, U.S. views on the government protecting morality, 43% of Catholics said that the government should do more to protect morality and 49% said that the government is too involved with morality [see Figure 5 for comparison]. These statistics are interesting as they reveal that U.S. Catholics’ views on life and morality issues differ from Benedict’s views. What is more interesting is the comparison of these statistics with the other religious affiliations in the United States. The Jehovah Witnesses held the strictest opinions on abortion, 77% said abortion it should be illegal in most or all cases, and regarding homosexuality a very similar percentage, 76%, said that it should be discouraged by society. Interestingly, question on a stricter environmental protection had the most similar percentage across most religious affiliations (52% or higher), Jews, and “other faiths” held the highest percentage 77% accepted that environmental protect would be worth the cost.

Since this survey was conducted five years ago, it is necessary to see if there have been any changes in Catholic views on these similar issues. The 2013 survey used earlier, Key Data from Pew Research on U.S. Catholics, addresses similar questions but is more specific, asking about birth control and gay marriage. This 2013 survey reported that 46.5% of Catholics view abortion should be illegal and 48% believe it should be legal.
Regarding their views on contraception, 15% see it as morally wrong, 41% believe it to be morally acceptable, and 36% said that it is not even a moral issue. Lastly, U.S. Catholic support for gay marriage has increased from 40% in 2001 to 54% in 2012. The acceptance or tolerance, of birth control, abortion, and gay marriage amongst U.S. Catholics does not indicate that they do not identify the environmental crisis as a life issue; rather it demonstrates that their overall opinions on contemporary issues, although not surprising, differs from that of the Vatican and Pope. This indicates the greater influence of the cultural, social, and secular outlooks on both personal and religious worldviews for Catholics in the U.S. today. Given these statistics, it is beneficial to ascertain the U.S. Catholic position on the environmental crisis and to discover how, and if so why, they differ from the Pope and Vatican.

Are U.S. Catholics Hearing Benedict’s Environmental Message?

The article “From the Pope to the Pew: Is Papal Teaching on the Environment a Factor in Moving Parishes to Action?” is by Daniel Misleh and Daniel R. DiLeo and it surveys if Benedict’s environmental message is inspiring U.S. Catholics into action. According to a survey conducted 2009 by Zogby International, 55% of Catholics believe that climate change is a problem, 59% agree that humans are the primary cause, and 58% believe that there is an urgent need to take action [see Figure 6 for reference and Figure 7 for comparison]. The survey asked about the negative impact of climate change for the future, specifically for the U.S. poor, global poor, and future generations, 52% agreed climate change will negative impact the U.S. poor, 60% saw that it would negatively impact the global poor and 66% agreed that climate change would have a negative impact
on future generations ("Pope to Pew" 3). The Zogby International survey then asked what motivates these U.S. Catholics to take action against climate change, 76% respect for creation, 67% helping to make the world safer for generations to come, 64% out of obligation to the poor, and 66% to help those with less resources to “withstand climate change impacts” ("Pope to Pew" 3). The data collected in this survey, thus far, does not seem to differ much from CISSM collected by Kull et al., however, when asked about the Church’s or the Pope’s teaching on the environment the results where significant. It was reported that, “less that a third knew that the Pope has spoken out about the environment” and that an even less percentage, “one in five knew about the US bishop’s statements” ("Pope to Pew" 3). This survey, conducted by Zogby International, was used by the Catholic Climate Covenant (CCC) to help determine how to best spread the message of Catholic environmentalism. With the statistical data provided in Zogby’s poll, the CCC decided to conduct their own survey, amongst those affiliated and have committed to the St. Francis pledged.

Daniel Misleh and Daniel R. DiLeo conclude this survey with three main points. First, most environmentally concerned U.S. Catholics only have a “vague awareness that the Pope has spoken out on the environment and climate change” ("Pope to Pew" 4). Second, given their high percentage of environmental concern, U.S. Catholics are more likely to be persuaded to action. Third, “messages from the media… have more to do with Catholic action on environmental concerns including climate change than does the Vatican, bishops or pastors” ("Pope to Pew" 4). Misleh and DiLeo conclude that the Church must “continue to find ways to be heard above the din of everyday American life, particularly through the media” ("Pope to Pew" 4). This is particularly true with regards
to the environmental crisis, as well as other life-issues, since Catholic environmentalism is much more human oriented than most secular environmentalists.

It is clear that there is an element of dissonance amongst U.S. Catholics on the environmental crisis. Some are upset that the Church has spoken out about such issues, believing that the Church is aligning itself with concerns that do not reflect Catholic values. Catholic Culture is a group that uniformly opposes that the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops addressing issues like the environmental crisis. They discouraged the USCCB’s involvement in such liberal issues (Borst “40 Shades”). Paul Crovo is an American Catholic, an energy analyst, and member of the Kitchen Table Patriots, which is a Tea Party Group. Crovo commented in a newspaper chain in Pennsylvania that he is increasingly disconcerted to see that the Catholic Church and Bishops are taking such an “inflexible position” on an issue that is “fraught with controversy and uncertainty” (par. 2). His conclusion cautions that the USCCB should be aware that it is aligning itself with “organizations professing beliefs in a radical environmental agenda” (par.11). Crovo argues that these environmental agendas “extol the virtues of population control and worship of the Earth to the detriment of mankind” (par.11). Crovo is not an anomaly; other Catholics in the United States share his objection with the Church’s role in regarding this crisis today [see Figure 8]. Benedict, however, has already addressed the sorts of concerns and objections held by the likes of Paul Crovo. Benedict rejects environmental plans that are ecocentric or biocentric, and especially if it involves population control. He argues for a human ecology, since it encompasses both the environment and humans, when it comes to modern day environmental responsibilities.
These opposite groups, Catholic Climate Covenant and Catholic Culture, provide a vivid example of the wide range of views amongst Catholics in the U.S. today. It is clear that Benedict’s environmental stance has an influence on certain U.S. Catholics, but it appears not everyone is hearing his environmental message.

While it might seem that there has not been a great reception to Benedict’s environmental message amongst U.S. Catholics, there have been reactions and responses internationally to Caritas in Veritate, Benedict’s last encyclical. The Financial Times discussed the influence that it had on the international political and governmental leaders. Writer for the Financial Times, Guy Dinmore, claimed that Caritas in Veritate was a topic of wide discussion during the G8 Summit\(^41\) in Italy that summer (“Pope Condemns Capitalism”) and that the summit approved in an additional $5 billion to combat global hunger (“G8”), which was raised repeatedly in Caritas in Veritate. Also, according to Emiliya Mychasuk who is another writer for the Financial Times, senior leaders of business’s and banks attended\(^42\) a discussion on the “relevance” of Caritas in Veritate for business and economics in the modern world (“Money and Morals”). It is at this higher level of governments, politicians, businesses, and corporations that a most of Benedict’s environmental message is directed to, because they have the power to make the significant changes as they provide example and opportunity for all other’s to follow.

\(^{41}\) An unofficial forum consisting of the wealthiest industrialised and developed countries from the world: France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Russia, plus the European Commission, and the European Council.

\(^{42}\) Such as Barclays, HSBC, Lloyd’s, Goldman Sach’s and CBI.
Chapter IX

Conclusions

This thesis conducted a close analysis, which showed how traditional Catholic thought has addressed and adopted the environmental crisis as a social justice issue. The nine fundamental principles of Catholic environmental teaching revealed the origin of Benedict’s environmental position. The central Catholic environmental teaching is anthropocentric and is based on defending human dignity. This anthropocentrism is the core to Pope Benedict XVI’s environmentalism, which has the strongest influence on his issues with relativism and the environmental crisis. The close reading of his personal background, intellectual worldview, and corpus determined that Benedict’s environmental concern is intertwined with his anti-relative views, and this study established three things.

First, his early experience and love for nature validated the later connection he made between the natural rhythms of the cosmos with Church liturgy, grounding in his admiration for the creation as God’s creation. Second, his prevailing issue with relativism in the modern world and the negative effects it has on religion and morality. His position on relativism, shaped by his experience of the Nazi regime and Marxist philosophy, raised his apprehension of the modern world - theologically and practically - given relativisms growing tolerance and acceptance. Third, and most important, are his concrete anthropocentric views, placing the human person at the centre of everything.
With regards to the environmental crisis, his anthropocentrism took shape in the form of “human ecology,” which reciprocally bound protecting the environment with protecting humankind. Benedict’s anthropocentrism also formed his anti-relativism because human rights and human dignity are universal truths and entitlements. Benedict’s experience of the Nazi regime, the rise of Marxism, and his anthropocentrism shaped his anti-relativism, which is interwoven with his stance on the environmental crisis.

Benedict’s “human ecology” and “peace ecology” are his solutions for the environmental crisis and will curb the dominant acceptance and tolerance of relativism. These concepts contain insights into how these two issues can be re-framed in a way that will break down the barriers of relativism and promote the understanding of humanity with the environmental crisis.

On March 22, 2013 in the Apostolic Palace’s Sala Regia, Pope Francis said to the Vatican diplomatic corps that moral relativism endangers the coexistence of humanity and is a threat to peace. His acknowledgment of this issue and the danger it poses for the modern world demonstrates that Benedict’s anti-relativism will continue to be addressed. Francis states without truth there can be no peace, especially “if everyone can always claim exclusively his own rights, without at the same time caring for the good of others, of everyone, on the basis of the nature that unites every human being on this earth.” It is clear that this problem is serious for Francis and will be addressed in his papacy. It will be interesting to discover if Francis makes the connection between the treat of relativism and the environmental crisis.

Further implications of my research may emerge because by analysing Benedict’s environmental work and his anti-relativistic views, we achieve a clearer understanding of
the logic informing particular traditional Catholic responses to other modern issues, including: abortion, bioethics, gay rights, and so forth.
Appendix I
Encyclical Abbreviation Chart

For complete bibliographic listing please see Works Cited (P. 129 f.f.), listed under the relevant Pope.

RN – Rerum Novarum, Leo XIII 1891
QA – Quadragesimo Anno, Pius XI 1931
MM – Mater et Magistra, John XXIII 1961
PT – Pacem in Terris, John XXIII 1963
GS – Guardium et Spes, Second Vatican Council 1965
DV – Dei Verbum, Paul VI 1965
PP – Populorum Progressio, Paul VI 1967
OA – Octogesima Adveniens, Paul VI 1971
RH – Redemptor Hominis, John Paul II 1979
LE – Laborem Exercens, John Paul II 1981
SRS – Sollicitudo Rei Socialis, John Paul II 1987
CA – Centesimus Annus, John Paul II 1991
VS – Veritatis Splendor, John Paul II 1993
EV – Evangelium Vitae, John Paul II 1995
DCE – Deus Caritas Est, Benedict XVI 2005
SS – Spe Salvi, Benedict XVI 2007
CV – Caritas Est, Benedict XVI 2009
Appendix II

“10 Commandments for the Environment”

Bishop Crepaldi, secretary Pontifical Council for Justice & Peace, created the “10 Commandments for the Environment,” from John Paul II’s *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church’s* chapter addressing environmental issues and concerns.

1. **Use, Don’t Abuse**
   The human being, created in God’s image, is placed above all other earthly creatures, which must be used and cared for in a responsible way in cooperation with the divine plan of redemption.

2. **Little Less Than a God**
   Nature is not a utilitarian object of manipulation, nor absolutized or placed above human dignity.

3. **One for All, All for One**
   Ecological responsibility involves the entire planet in a common duty to respect the environment as a collective good, for present and future generations.

4. **It’s not a Brave New World**
   In dealing with environmental problems, ethics and human dignity should come before technology.

5. **Gaia Isn’t God**
   Nature is not a sacred or divine reality, removed from human intervention. Thus, human intervention that modifies some characteristics of living things is not wrong, as long as it respects their place in their particular ecosystem.

6. **What Price Progress?**
   The politics of development must be coordinated with the politics of ecology, and every environmental cost in development projects must be weighted carefully.

7. **Flowing Like a River**
   Ending global poverty is related to environmental questions, remembering that the goods of the earth must be shared equitably.
8. We’re All in the Same Boat
The right to a safe and clean environment needs to be protected through international cooperation and accords.

9. Discipline is Not a Four-Letter Word
Environmental protection requires a change in lifestyles that reflect moderation and self-control, on a personal and social level. That means moving away from the mind-set of consumerism.

10. It’s All Gift
Environmental issues call for a spiritual response, inspired by the belief that creation is a gift that God has placed into our responsible hands, so that we can use it with loving care. The human person’s attitude toward nature should be one of gratitude and gratefulness to the God who has created and supports it.

(Koenig-Bricker Ten Commandments for the Environment, 22-23, 26-134).
### Views About Abortion

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<th>Legal in most cases</th>
<th>Illegal in most cases</th>
<th>Illegal in all cases</th>
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<td>16%</td>
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**Question wording:** On another subject, do you think abortion should be (READ CATEGORIES IN ORDER TO HALF SAMPLE, IN REVERSE ORDER TO OTHER HALF OF SAMPLE) legal in all cases, legal in most cases, illegal in most cases, or illegal in all cases?

---

Views About Homosexuality

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Question wording: Now I’m going to read you a few pairs of statements. For each pair, tell me whether the FIRST statement or the SECOND statement comes closer to your own views – even if neither is exactly right. 1 - Homosexuality is a way of life that should be accepted by society. OR 2 - Homosexuality is a way of life that should be discouraged by society.


### Views About Environmental Protection

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**Question wording:** Now I’m going to read you a few pairs of statements. For each pair, tell me whether the FIRST statement or the SECOND statement comes closer to your own views — even if neither is exactly right. 1 - Stricter environmental laws and regulations cost too many jobs and hurt the economy, OR 2 - Stricter environmental laws and regulations are worth the cost.

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### Views About Government’s Role in Protecting Morality

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<th>Government is too involved in morality</th>
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**Question wording:** Now I’m going to read you a few pairs of statements. For each pair, tell me whether the **FIRST** statement or the **SECOND** statement comes closer to your own views—even if neither is exactly right. **1.** The government should do more to protect morality in society, OR **2.** I worry the government is getting too involved in the issue of morality.


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PEW RESEARCH CENTER Oct. 13-18, 2010. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding. *Asked of those who say global warming is a very serious, somewhat serious or not too serious a problem; figures based on total.


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*Asked of those who say global warming is a very serious, somewhat serious or not too serious a problem.
Bibliography

I. Works Cited


II. Works Consulted


