

Ecological Humanism and its Development Philosophy in Contemporary Society

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ABSTRACT

This study examined Ecological Humanism and explicated the social and moral links between the humanity and the ecology in contemporary society. The latter houses the former; the former is met to promote and protect the latter. Using the thought of John Paul II with his issuance of Centesimus Annus in 1991, with an emphasis on Human Development, he calls for the proper understanding of humanity via the embrace of Ecological Spirituality which recognises that humanity is a composite of matter and spirit that should be redeemed in its wholeness without any trace of natural or fashioned aberration. Then, there is an urgent call for the respect of human rights and social justice. The evaluation is on the importance of putting on the right dispositional consciousness in maintaining the natural arrangements for the attainment of healthy environmental habitation as in view of achieving the salvific mission of Christ which the Church preaches unrelentingly. The whole cosmic systematic arrangement of natural events demands that human species and non-human species should be protected from avert environmental or ecological conditions which are detrimental to healthy living.

Keywords: *Charity, Social Justice, Moral Responsibilities, Ecological Humanism*

INTRODUCTION

One of the social justice agenda in modern society is the agitation of ecological sustainability. It hang heavily on the moral and social consciousness of those who are still environmentally concerned in relating development with the importance of existence of humanity. This necessarily presupposes the existence of man on the earth as the centre of concentration and evaluation, because his activities affect greatly the environmental composition and arrangement. In many ways, his negative dealings outweigh the opposite. The ecological degradations which have been evident in recent times have been very worrisome because if care is not taken, these might lead humanity into extinction. The world is a simple village, and then it is communal and mutually and unconsciously interactive. Then, every effect of any single act by an individual supposedly visits the rest in the village. Just as Tempels (1969) philosophically asserts that nothing moves in the universe of forces without influencing others by its movement. The world of forces is held like spider's web of which no single thread can be caused to vibrate without shaking the whole network. This is why all human actions have to be properly managed; even humanity has the gift of freedom and intellect.

Equally worrying is the ecological question which accompanies the

problem of consumerism and which is closely connected to it. In his desire to have and to enjoy rather than to be and to grow, man consumes the resources of the earth and his own life in an excessive and disordered way. At the root of the senseless destruction of the natural environment lies an anthropological error, which unfortunately is widespread in our day (John Paul II, 1991).

Humanity cannot do without development because this showcases the essence of humankind. Mankind has rights and dignity which must be protected and promoted, and these include the right of human labour, even, that of those who will live in future on the same earth which we have inherited from the past generation. If we take humanity as a family and if we are not to deny anyone of them the rights to their existence and sustenance, this would also be true with regard to the members of future generations, since they too are part of the one humanity that God has made (Kusumalayam, 2008). Charity demands that we in the present generation be conscious about the environment and put on the right spirituality toward maintaining the elements of ecosystem that will keep lives living. The thrust of this write-up is on the aberrations that are associated with man's wrong use of his freedom and work against the positive arrangement of things.

Today there is not only the injustice of the inequitable distribution of resources, there is also the even more unjust denial of the right for the options to mould their lives by our unilateral, far reaching action, in particular those affecting the very nature of our environment. We are passing irreversible justice on all the future options of humankind by our selfish decisions, not only with respect to physical resources but also with respect to knowledge, skills and cultural adaptability (Indian National Trust for Art Cultural Heritage, 1993).

This case or situation calls for the institution of the culture of 'ecological humanism' where the human conscience is shape to respect his personhood, the lives of non-humans and the protection of the whole ecosystem, irrespective of what man is doing to define his essence. Though, man is 'homo faber' that is, 'the Workman' specifies that quality of his existence, but for the non-detrimental to his existence. Man's working condition is about proper human and societal developments. The term 'human development' should mean not simply the progress in attaining material resources and well-being, but the holistic development of an individual as a human person, which addresses also the way in which such development is brought about (Kusumalayam, 2008). But the wrong considerations of development have brought many versions of ecological or environmental fallouts. According to John Paul II (1991), man thinks that he can make arbitrary use of the earth, subjecting it without restraint to his will as though it did not have its own requisites and a prior God-given purpose, which man can indeed develop but must not betray. The aim of this study, hence, is to examine Ecological Humanism and explicate the social and moral links between the humanity and the ecology in contemporary society. This study will also examine the thought of John Paul II on the importance of 'Ecological Humanism' as a mental tool for man to manage his freedom, intellect and the earth resources toward holistic human and societal development.

The Ecological Humanism Considerations: Ecological Humanism is a concept that is derived from the word 'ecology' which connotes "the scientific study of plants, animals, or peoples and institutions, in relation to environment". It is a concerned concept that is associated with the environment and its effects. 'Ecological' comes to mean the process of the application of the concerns relating the processes, methods that are beneficial to the natural environment, while 'Humanism' is derived from the concept 'human' and 'humane' which means 'having the qualities of a person' or 'the limitations of people' and 'having the feelings proper to man' respectively. So, 'Humanism' comes to mean, literally, 'any system which puts human interests and the mind of man paramount, rejecting the supernatural, belief in a god (The Chambers Dictionary, New Edition).

Humanism, as a philosophical theory, "stems from the perennial need of human beings to find significance in their lives, to integrate their personalities around some clear, consistent and compelling view of existence, and to seek definite and reliable methods in the solution of their problems (Lamont, Nd). Then, 'Ecological Humanism' will literally be considered as a system in which human feelings and conditions are used to evaluate what happen to the ecology or the environment in general, or the human individualistic assessment of ecological matters in accordance with his feelings. With this, the meaning of ecological humanism appears to be sectional and negative, because the definition of humanism rejects any belief on the supernatural thing or god, then making man the central point of interest and consideration and assessment of matters. This negates the supernatural conception of the ecological arrangement of the universe which strongly involves the personhood and the divine nature of the Creator 'God'. But, in the minds of the ecclesiastical community as explained by Paul VI (1967), the concept 'Humanism' does not necessarily and generally connote negativity of conceptual understanding of human actions and beliefs in using his feelings for the assessment of realities and conditions, as he say that:

The ultimate goal is a full-bodied humanism. And does this not mean the fulfillment of the whole man and of every man? A narrow humanism, closed in on itself and not open to the values of the spirit and to God who is their source, could achieve apparent success, for man can set about organizing terrestrial realities without God. But "closed off from God, they will end up being directed against man. A humanism closed off from other realities becomes inhuman." True humanism points the way toward God and acknowledges the task to which we are called, the task which offers us the real meaning of human life. Man is not the ultimate measure of man. Man becomes truly man only by passing beyond himself (Paul VI, 1967:42).

So, the sense of 'ecological humanism' is about the proper humanistic socialisation and integration of ethical, social and moral responsibility for the benefits of the earth and everything therein. Responsibility in this light is the essential makeup rather than make-belief of the individual ability to be just, humane and peaceable with natures and non-natures. This sense of responsibility should lead every generation of mankind to come out of an economics that is solidly founded on the extreme individualism and work toward envisioning an economics for the global community with extends in time and space. This is

about the consciousness of establishment of common good in human society with right disposition for the value of life. According to John Paul II (1993), it is about the rational ordering of the human act to the good in its truth and the voluntary pursuit of that good known by reason, constitute morality. Hence, human activity cannot be judged as morally good merely because it is a means for attaining one or another of its goals, or simply because the subject intention is good.

Then, in the pavilion of ecclesiastical authorities, ecological humanism is the ordering of the good in nature by man for the attainment of the needed development and growth, putting on the right disposition toward earthly wealth and in the management of freedom, intellect and general natural resources known as commonwealth of the nations, having the right consciousness not to interfere in the flow of natural order via activities that are detrimental to the ecosystem, even in the name of exploration of the tools and products of science and technology. It is evident that many damages have been done already that need to be corrected if possible, further not to be avoided. The call is on the evaluation of proposed action before it is put in place. It must be for the common good for all. Today, because of the ecological threats on the biosphere, the nuclear threats and all the other threats deriving from the latest outbreak of human folly; we must assume our responsibilities towards the future. We cannot predict the shape of the future; but we can try to avoid disasters of all kind so as to improve the lot of humanity (Morin, 2004). This is about every individual been ecologically humanistic in character and in action.

Pope John Paul II's Centesimus Annus on Ecological Issue and Human Development: On the 100th Anniversary of the issuance of *Rerum Novarum* (On the New Things) by Pope Leo XIII on the 15th May, 1891, which is about the condemnation of the culture of Atheistic Communism and for the upholding the right of private property by the rejection of socialism, while also opposing the evils of capitalism of his time, this was before the Universal Declaration of Fundamental Human Rights on the 10th December, 1948, the issuance of *Centesimus Annus* on the 1st May, 1991 by John Paul II exemplified the importance of the placement of man at the creation in relationship with his Creator, God, in understanding himself as 'homofaber' - the workman in nature. This understanding of man's role in nature will necessarily bring about the understanding of the points of conditions and consideration of work which *Rerum Novarum* is met to explain.

The central points of *Centesimus Annus* are: the understanding of the universal destination of the material goods; the role of the State and culture towards development; man as the way of the Church; the management of the natural and human resources; and the final destination of humankind (Ezechi, 2006). John Paul II as a Pontiff whom the World has regarded as an exemplary leader, even after his death, has being in the thoughts of many thinkers when socio-political and environmental issues are discuss toward the better of the human society, especially the factors of peace, equity and justice. The world is in a continuous search and need for such leader, who will encourage the people to contribute their energies, as well as their mental, physical and material resources towards the ever better attainment of the common good. Leaders like him act as a moral force and booster for people to emulate; they engender zealousness into their people; stimulating

and vitalising all interested individuals who share in the common endeavour (Arinze, 2005). Therefore, with his documents, such as *Centesimus Annus*, Pope John Paul II has shown that he was a leader who had the interest of the whole human race in mind, especially towards the attainment of holistic development of the human society, and the ultimate achievement of the salvation of all human souls which re-echoes in the Church and in nature. He believes that the human soul has to be redemptive with the body.

The body must be healthy for the soul to be healthy and spiritual. Then, he advocates for the redemption of the complete composite humanity. The document exemplifies and explicates the elements of the doctrine of 'theories'; cultural and societal acculturation; evangelised culture of love; the reign of holistic humanity; the value of the human family, freedom and social responsibilities; the doctrines of solidarity and subsidiarity; human rights advocacy; the role of the Church and the societal man towards development. All these are toward the redemptive end of humanity, that is, the final union of the Humanity with the Divinity that is visibly fashioned in the salvific mission of Christ. These are all urgent; they are, because, according to Danfulani (1991), today, man has created a lot of discrimination, segregation and inhumanity between himself and his fellow man. Such differentiations have always been based on racial, socio-economic, political and religious factors. The question of race always stands out clearly as a deforming factor of global man's inhumanity to man, even if this exists as part of the basis of neo-colonialism. Hence, these positive elements listed in this ecclesial document have been under the threats from the wrong uses of human freedom and intellect, in the application of the tools and products of science and technology, and the false acquisition of economic and political powers. But, freedom and intellect obtain their legitimacies for natural ordering of things, that is, the Natural Law, then, they must be carried out with moral conscience and truth. In a world without truth, freedom loses its foundation and man is exposed to the dangers of violence and passion, and he can easily be manipulated, both in the open and hidden abuses (John Paul II, 1991). The truth is about the value man places on his works and activities for his own ends, not taking himself as a means, but the final end of/in everything that he does, even in scientific and technological engagement. Then, Benedict XVI (2009) asserts that:

Technology enables us to exercise dominion over matter, to reduce risks, to save labour, to improve our conditions of life. It touches the heart of the vocation of human labour: in technology, seen as the product of his genius, man recognizes himself and forges his own humanity. Technology is the objective side of human action whose origin and raison d'etre is found in the subjective element: the worker himself. For this reason, technology is never merely technology. It reveals man and his aspirations towards development; it expresses the inner tension that impels him gradually to overcome material limitations (Benedict XVI, 2009:69).

Benedict XVI (2009) comments on the role of science and technology in humanity but also points out its limitation, "Human knowledge is insufficient and the conclusions of science cannot indicate by themselves the path towards integral human development. There is always a need to push further ahead: this is what is required by charity in truth".

The culture of ecological humanism demands the holistic embrace of the value of truth and charity. It is about the newness which is experienced in following Christ demands to be communicated to other people in their concrete difficulties, struggles, problems and challenges, so that these can then be illuminated and made more human in the light of faith. Faith not only helps people to find solutions; it makes even situations of suffering humanly bearable, so that in these situations people will not become lost or forget their dignity and vocation (John Paul II, 1991), and all development worthy of the name must be integral, that is, it must be directed to the true good of every person and of the whole person (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004). In the name of ecological matters, the life-styles of every individual and nation should be inspired by sobriety, temperance and self-discipline at both the individual and social levels. The ecological question must not be faced solely because of the frightening prospects that environmental destruction represents; rather it must above all become a strong motivation for an authentic solidarity of worldwide dimensions (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004). This gift is made possible by the human person's essential capacity for transcendence. Man cannot give himself to a purely human plan for reality, to abstract ideal or to a false utopia. As a person, he can give himself to another person or to other persons, and ultimately to God, who is the author of his being and alone can fully accept his gift (John Paul II, 1991).

The Societal Man in the Growing Nature: The global case or situation calls for the institution of the culture of 'ecological humanism' where the human conscience is shaped towards the respect for human personhood, the lives of non-humans and the protection of the whole ecosystem, irrespective of what man is doing to define his essence. This responsibility is global, for it is concerned not just with energy but with the whole of creation, which must not be bequeathed to future generations depleted of its resources. Human being legitimately exercises a responsible stewardship over nature, in order to protect it, to enjoy its fruits and to cultivate it in new ways, with the assistance of advanced technologies, so that it can worthily accommodate and feed the world's population (Benedict XVI, 2009). And like every other reasonable group, the Church has a responsibility towards creation and she must assert this responsibility in the public sphere. In so doing, she must defend not only earth, water and air as gifts of creation that belong to everyone. She must above all protect mankind from self-destruction. There is need for what might be called a human ecology, correctly understood (Benedict XVI, 2009).

Everything surrounds the consideration of the human person, and though not fully understood because of his composition. The paradoxes of the human person point to two facts: the obvious fact that man is a child of nature, subject to its vicissitudes, compelled by its necessities, driven by its impulses, and confined within the brevity of his years which nature permits its varied organic form. The other fact is that man is a spirit who stands outside of nature, life, himself, his reason and the world (Udoh, Mbuk and Ejiogun, 2008). Even with these prospects, one can see that the world is sick and then man is equally very sick and ill. Its illness consist less in the unproductive monopolisation of resources by a small number of people than in the lack of brotherhood among individuals and peoples

(Paul VI, 1967), especially as a result of man's activities that lead to environmental degradations. This state of menace for man from what he produces shows itself in various directions and various degrees of intensity. We seem to be increasingly aware of the fact that the exploitation of the earth, the planet on which we are living, demands rational and honest planning (John Paul II, 1979). All these are about the call for environmental friendliness, adoption and socialisation, and with the consciousness in sipping the importance in and of nature. It is about the change of human mentality toward positive and humanised development, therefore, we must be prepared to take on new functions and new duties in every sector of human activities and especially in the sectors of world society if justice and peace are really to be put into practice. Sustainable development is the human moral response to think and act in the interests of themselves and their posterity, especially by protecting earth's natural habitats. It is an approach to protecting natural environment, which is urgently demanded now for human continuity or perpetuity (Igwilu, 2008). Hence, when discussing environment what comes to mind is the condition of it.

Thus the meaning of a “safe and healthy” environment remains ambiguous. It can mean being in a situation where we are free from the threat of crime or from the threats of pollution. But when it is used strictly in the context of a “right to safe and healthy” environment it has now come to mean being free from a “particular set of threats” to human safety, namely those which stem from technological and industrial processes the disposal of sewage and wastes (Kusumalayam, 2008). It demands the collective conscience and positive symbiosis by the whole humanity that she is part of the environment and it presses on her to protect it. The environment is a home which houses all that is therein. Peace is inevitable for development; this is because the effort one makes in correcting errors is always greater than that of proper planning. A national strategic plan and war have something in common. Both have the capacity to change the face of the nation positively or negatively. A nation, which declares war without the political will to persecute it, will lose. Similarly, you cannot get the full benefit of the strategic plan for a country without the political will to implement it (Onyekakeyah, 2008).

We all have collective responsibility to the environment, for the benefits of human and non-human organisms. We know that "we have before us here a great drama that can leave nobody indifferent. The person who is trying to draw the maximum profit and, on the other hand, is paying the price in damage and injury is always man. The drama is made still worse by the presence close at hand of the privileged social classes and of the rich countries, which accumulate goods to an excessive degree and the misuse of whose riches very often becomes the cause of various ills (John Paul II (1979). Man is allowed to use his God-given talents, not to exploit but to explore his environment, in order to derive comfort and joys in it all. In another light, man and nations should allow their freedom to be controlled by morality, spirit of common goodness, diplomatic interest and respect for local and international agencies' policies, even in the name of military, scientific and technological advancements. The United Nations' involvement and conscious commitment have shown that the attainment of peace and justice is possible, coping with the demanded cooperation from the members' States. It must be knowledge, therefore, that the United Nations

Organisation, even with limitations and delays due in great part to the failures of its members, has made a notable contribution to the promotion of respect for human dignity, the freedom of peoples and the requirements of development, thus preparing the cultural and institutional soil for the building of peace (John Paul II, 2004). Though, the commission recognises that humanity today is in a new and more difficult phase of its genuine development, it needs a greater degree of international ordering (John Paul II, 1988). Individual States or members must try to adhere to the dictates of the organisation. The demands of this cohesion of this international organisation and its members' States are hinged on the elimination of conflicts and wars among nations, for political litigations and its monitoring, and economic diplomatic principles for the whole humanity that will foster the needed development as its encourages international partnership in technological, scientific, cultural, social and financial services.

Then, Benedict XVI (2007) explains the necessity for responsible politics toward societal harmony, when he asserts that Justice is both the aim and the intrinsic criterion of all politics. Politics is more than a mere mechanism for defining the rule of public life: its origin and its goal are found in justice, which by its very nature has to do with ethics. The State must inevitably face the question of how justice can be achieved here and now. Developmental peace strives where there is the application of distributive justice, because, in it, both the rich and the poor will have a feel of equality of national resources and less recourse to conflicts. Hence, it is highly believed and accepted that the pursuit of justice must be a fundamental norm of the State and that the aim of a just social order is to guarantee to each person, according to the subsidiarity his share of the community's goods (Nnoruga, 2007). The international litigation effort must be intensified for the cause of just social ordering, according to Benedict XVI (2007), humanity is going through a period of historical upheaval because of the new political forms and dominant economic systems that are emerging, which are determining new social realities. The world situation is tragically problematical and in no way reassuring. There is widespread injustice, a situation that undermined the fundamental rights and freedom of individuals and even nation. The whole scenario is such that global peace and security are threatened (Ehusani, 1992). The issues of development of nuclear weapons by some States; political interest in building of military strengths and cohesions; racism; corruption in governances and the likes, suggest the continuation of human conflicts. Though, in all these, "man continues to long for peace and justice, but been the architect of his own destruction."

CONCLUSION

The humanity including the Church is ever living in hope for better world to come in the future. Humanity is ever futuristic, and the constantly hopeful in her proclamation for the fullest realisation of the truth in nature. The radical transformation of the world in the Pascal Mystery of the Lord gives full meaning to the effort of men, and in particular of the young, to lessen injustice, violence and hatred and they advance all together in justice, freedom, brotherhood and love (Synod of Bishops, 1971). These are the qualities of the human person with the mentality of ecological humanism that wishes to gather with the Church the

whole human race toward the knowledge of the created world in the personhood of God. Knowledge is employed at the service of life and primarily in the service of self-preservation. This has necessarily give man the instinct which have created in man the organs of knowledge and given them such capacity as they possess. Man sees, hears, tastes and smells that which is necessary for him in order to preserve his life (Unamuno, 1954). Humanity will be very hopeful that when humankind abides the culture of 'Ecological Spirituality', peace, justice and healthy life-style will overwhelm humanity. Peace expresses itself only in peace, a peace which is not separate from the demands of justice but which is fostered by personal sacrifice, clemency, mercy and love (Paul VI, 1976). This spirituality adjudicates, in the words of Pius X (1907) that scientific progress demands that the concepts of Christian doctrine concerning God, Creation, Revelation, the person of the incarnate World, and redemption be readjusted, meaning the readjustment is an attempt of making sure man is redeemed. Humanity is then pushed now and always to acquire confidence, prudence, courage, commitment, sincerity, honesty and wisdom that are required for effective and adequate projection and planning of our transactions (Unah, 2006). These are qualities or virtues that should be exercised in humanised freedom that is buried in transcendent principles of the created world.

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