

The principles of CST from an ecological perspective

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by Fr. Martín Carbajo Nuñez, OFM
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The growing ecological awareness invites us to broaden the horizons of the four principles of Catholic Social Teaching (CST): human dignity, solidarity, subsidiarity, and the common good^[1].

The first principle affirms that the human being is an image of God (*“imago Dei”*) and has a very special dignity which, however, does not imply separation, but rather collaboration and service. Being capable for God (*“capax Dei”*) and, at the same time, brother of all creatures, the human being must serve them in the logic of gift, thus imitating the *kenosis* of Christ. Therefore, the awareness of his human dignity must not separate him from the rest of creation, but rather reinforce his responsibility towards all creatures. We are all brothers and sisters of the same heavenly God and part of a single project of love.

On the other hand, the respect for creation does not mean that it is static and untouchable, as some neo-pagan or pantheistic movements claim, sacralizing it as “an untouchable taboo” (CV 48).

In the name of an idea inspired by egocentrism and biocentrism it is being proposed that the ontological and axiological difference between men and other living beings be eliminated, since the biosphere is considered a biotic unity of undifferentiated value^[2].

Christianity has desacralized nature, thus opening the way to scientific knowledge and the use of technology. The divine artist has left it in our hands so that we can bring his work of art to perfection, but we must respect his original creative project. Nature is, therefore, a dynamic and perfectible reality. As such, it has been entrusted to our care and, in turn, we are also cared for by creatures. We give them a voice and they support us and help us to contemplate the presence of God.

The principle of subsidiarity (*subsidium afferre*) compels us to support creatures so that they can fulfill the plan assigned to each of them by the Creator. This excludes any despotic domination and any tentative of reducing them to pure neutral matter. In his *Canticle of Creatures*, Francis of Assisi presides over them, gives voice to their praise and catalyzes their desire to enter into communion with the Trinitarian God.

The principle of solidarity must also enlarge its range in space (to the entire cosmic family) and in time (to include future generations). «There is a solidarity among all creatures arising from the fact that all have the same Creator and are all ordered to his glory» (CCC 344). «The ecological crisis reveals the urgent moral need for a new solidarity – at the international level – for the promotion of a natural and social environment that is both peaceful and healthy» (WDP1990, 10).

Pope Benedict XVI, in chapter 3 of the encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, prefers to use the term “fraternity” rather than “solidarity”, to emphasize the individuality of each being. Equality is valued without underestimating diversity. Unconditional hospitality is promoted, instead of uniformity^[3]. Creatures are also sisters and have a value in themselves, as well as a functionality that we cannot ignore, since everything is intimately related.

The liberal-capitalist ideology has reduced the principle of the common good to the sum of particular interests (CA 47). Marxist ideology equated it with the good of the sovereign state and sacrificed the good of the individual to it. With Pope John XXIII, the Church reaffirms the universal dimension of the common good, which had often been reduced to the limits of each sovereign state. The ecological crisis forces us to expand the concept of the common good to embrace all people, including future generations, and the entire creation.

Fr. Martín Carbajo Nuñez, OFM

[1] To properly frame these paragraphs, see the book from which they are taken: Carbajo-Núñez Martín, *Everything is Connected. Integral ecology and communication in the Digital Age*, TAU Phoenix (AZ) 2021.

[2] John Paul II, «Address to conference on environment and health» (March 24, 1997), n. 5.

[3] A further explanation of how fraternity goes beyond the usual way of understanding solidarity: Carbajo-Núñez M., *A free and fraternal economy, The Franciscan perspective*, Tau, Phoenix, AZ, 2017, 139-140.