

The Pro-Lifer's Pro-Life Duty to Advocate a Balanced Environmental Ethic

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ABSTRACT: While some forms of environmentalism are opposed to respect for unborn human life, this is not true of every form. This paper addresses the inconsistency of claiming to be pro-life while engaging in environmental practices that result in needless harm to human life and health. It also highlights the need of pro-lifers to form and elect politicians who are concerned with protecting human life, not only by what are commonly understood to be pro-life measures but also by appropriate environmental measures. Lastly, it explains why the pro-life movement would benefit by espousing an environmental ethics that does not reduce nature solely to a means to our material well-being.

MOST PRO-LIFERS are probably aware that of late more and more environmentalists are adopting an anti-life attitude. Bioethicist Wesley Smith lists as one of the top ten bioethics stories of the decade the “ascendance of an anti-human environmentalism” when he notes that

China’s one-child policy is not considered anathema by many global-warming alarmists, and is even extolled by influential leaders. The head of the U.K. Green party, Jonathon Porritt, who chairs the U.K. government’s Sustainable Development Commission, said that curbing population growth through contraception and abortion must be at the heart of policies to fight global warming.¹

¹ Wesley J. Smith, “Technological Morality,” *National Review Online* (28 Jan. 2010), <http://www.nationalreview.com/articles/228913/technological-morality/wesley-j-smith>. Regarding Jonathon Porritt’s views, see http://women.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/women/families/article5627634, and http://women.timesonline.co.uk/tol/lifeand_style/women/families/article5627634.

Unfortunately, it not just certain environmentalists who are guilty of anti-human environmentalism but certain pro-lifers as well. As I intend to make clear in this paper, both the lifestyle choices that these pro-lifers make and the politicians whom they support can contribute to the destruction of other people's lives and health. First I intend to speak about the scandal of pro-lifers engaging in environmental practices that harm others' health and sometimes cause premature deaths. Then I will expose the all-too prevalent anti-life practices of those pro-life legislators who fail to promote environmental protection laws that protect human life. Lastly, I will address the need for pro-lifers to recognize that a balanced environmental ethic looks not only to caring for human well-being but also to preserving the integrity of nature. To do otherwise is to neglect the truth, something that is bad in itself and that provides an opening for anti-lifers to discredit the pro-life movement.

The Neglect Results in Human Deaths and Illnesses

Environmental practices are often pro-life practices. Since human beings derive what they need to live from the earth, the way in which we treat the earth in many instances affects the lives and health of others. This is perhaps most obvious in the case of our water resources. Wasting, polluting, or hoarding water can result in people becoming seriously ill or dying from thirst, chemical poisoning, or parasitic diseases. For this reason the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace affirms that access to clean water is a "right to life issue" in the broad sense of the term.² This view is not just a religious view but one with a basis in natural law. According to the natural law, the earth and its goods do not belong exclusively to any given human individual but are meant to sustain the entire human family, including future generations. While private ownership is generally the best means to insure that this goal is

² See Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, "A Contribution of the Delegation of the Holy See on the Occasion of the Third World Water Forum" at Kyoto, 16-23 March 2003, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20030322_kyoto-water_en.html, 2-3.

achieved, it remains the case that one can use private property in a manner that prevents other people from deriving from the earth what they need to live. For example, the fact that one acts justly by paying one's electricity bills does not justify turning up the heat or the air conditioning needlessly high, for this course of action would unjustifiably consume non-renewable resources and could eventually cause harm to other people who will consequently lack those resources. Such practices can even harm people in the short run, depending on how the energy is produced. For example, in the 2012 debate in Texas about the construction of more coal-burning power plants, those who opposed it did so on the following health grounds: (1) Pollution from coal plants shortens the lives of about 1,160 Texans each year. It also causes the loss of 196,149 work days to sickness, 1,105 hospitalizations and 33,987 asthma attacks every year. (2) Each year, about 144 lung cancer deaths and 1,791 heart attacks in Texas are attributable to power plant pollution. (3) A study produced by the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio found that autism increases by some 17% for every 1,000 pounds of mercury that is emitted locally in Texas.³ There would also be less pressure to *mine* coal if people conserved more energy and/or insisted upon getting energy from renewable (albeit more costly) sources. Coal mining affects the health both of the miners themselves and of those living in mining communities.⁴ In West Virginia alone it is estimated that some 313 people die every year from coal mining pollution.⁵

As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* notes in the section devoted to the fifth commandment, not only are direct crimes against life (such as abortion and euthanasia) covered by this commandment but so are more indirect crimes:

Life and physical health are precious gifts entrusted to us by God. We must take reasonable care of them, taking into account the needs of others and the

³ Stop the Coal Plants from Moving into Your Neighborhood, <http://www.stopthecoalplant.org/>.

⁴ See <http://www.energyjustice.net/coal>.

⁵ See "Chronic Illness Linked To Coal-Mining Pollution, Study Shows," *Science Daily* (26 March 2008), <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/03/080326201751.htm>

common good. *Concern for the health* of its citizens requires that society help in the attainment of living conditions that allow them to grow and reach maturity: food and clothing, housing....”⁶

Respecting the fifth commandment requires that we do not use the environment in a way that unduly affects the ability of others to have access to life’s necessities. As pro-lifers, we need to conserve energy, to recycle, to compost, to use paperless communication, to buy food grown in a sustainable manner, to eat less meat,⁷ to avoid buying fish belonging to species that are over-fished, to refill water bottles, and in general to follow commonly advised environmental practices where failure to do so has a direct or indirect negative impact on the lives of other people.

I do not mean to say that in the case of every environmental practice one is necessarily morally at fault for not implementing it. Circumstances have to be taken into account. For example, public transportation may be unduly burdensome, and the nearest farmer’s market may be a long drive away. Financial considerations plainly justify less than optimal environmental practices in some cases. Organic produce can cost two to five times more than regular produce, and thus may be beyond the reach of many family budgets. Still, there are many simple practices that pro-lifers could implement, but some choose not to -- at the expense of other people’s lives and health.

Sometimes non-culpable ignorance explains why pro-life individuals engage in practices that affect the environment in a way that adversely affects human life and health for others. Keeping up with

⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Washington DC: U.S. Catholic Conference, 1997) §2288 (found in the section on the fifth commandment). Hereafter cited as CCC.

⁷ Raising cattle requires a large amount of water, and in some areas this results in water shortages. The excrement produced by large-scale meat production causes various sorts of pollution (e.g., volatized ammonia, a gas aggravating respiratory diseases). The feed-to-flesh conversion rate ranges from approximately 8:1 for beef to 3:1 for chicken. This means that there would be much more food available to feed the hungry if it was not being fed to animals. See Pamela Rice, *101 Reasons Why I’m a Vegetarian*, 9th ed. (New York NY: VivaVeggie Society, 2011) concerning the aforementioned problems surrounding meat production.

environmental issues can be a full-time job. Whenever I teach environmental ethics, I struggle to keep abreast of the most recent issues. One has to make choices when it comes to deciding what to do about what one reads about, and currently there is much news about legislation and judicial decisions bearing on pre-born human beings and on end-of-life issues. To the extent that many environmental issues are also pro-life issues (at least in the broad sense), pro-lifers should dedicate some of their time to keeping up on them. Moreover, there are any number of sensible environmental practices that one can readily learned about, for they are repeated to us over and over by the media. Likewise, it would be easy to read the energy tips that our utilities companies send us.

Pro-life groups have a responsibility to encourage their members to inform themselves about environmental practices that have a negative impact on human life and to act accordingly. When it is a parish group, at least part of one meeting a year could be devoted to speaking about such practices. A certain number of pro-lifers have a knee-jerk reaction against any practice deemed “green.” They need to learn that although some purportedly environmental practices are clearly anti-life and some are silly or futile, many are conducive to human life and health. Pro-life groups should educate their members that “the way humanity treats the environment influences the way it treats itself, and vice versa.”⁸

These words of Pope Benedict XVI call to our attention that bad stewardship of the environment generally goes hand-in-hand with harm to human life. Thus, when pro-lifers hear environmentalists protesting misuses of the environment, they should listen with special attention. The conjunction of environmental abuses with harm to humans is perhaps most clearly seen when one considers certain practices that are widespread in the food industry in America. Too often big food corporations exploit workers in ways that affect their health, while at the same time causing environmental damage such as pollution, which can easily affect human health. Big agriculture also generally favors the production of food products in ways that are cheap but not always the

⁸ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate* §51 (www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate_en.html).

best for human health.⁹ Thus the choices that we make as to the food that we purchase can negatively affect human life in three ways. One of these is a consequence of the way we treat the environment.¹⁰ Pro-lifers can help insure that the environment is treated in a way that will better allow the earth to produce food for future generations by shopping at farmers' markets or buying food through food coops. Doing so supports farmers on small farms who generally use farming techniques that are more sustainable than those used by agribusiness.¹¹ It also contributes to

⁹ See Ethan A. Huff, "Is There Fluoride in Your Grapes?" in *Nature News* (9 August 2012): "Grape growers in particular have long used a chemical known as cryolite, which also goes by the trade name Kryocide, to deter leaf-eating and other types of pests. This fluoride-based chemical is used on all sorts of food crops.... Since fluoride chemicals are persistent and do not biodegrade, they often build up in soils where plants uptake them into their roots, stems, leaves, and even their fruit. This has clearly been observed in grapes, for instance, which often contain levels of fluoride far higher than the U.S. *Environmental Protection Agency's* (EPA) maximum contaminant level (MCL) for fluoride of four parts per million (ppm). Many domestic wines, in fact, have levels of fluoride so high that they cannot be exported to Europe and other places where MCL thresholds for fluoride are lower than they are in the U.S." (http://www.naturalnews.com/036753_fluoride_pesticides_grapes.html).

¹⁰ There are many interesting programs that pro-lifers could watch individually or as a group to educate themselves as to how certain environmental practices harm others. The documentary "Tapped," for example, brings out how the production of the plastic used in bottled water adversely affects people's health, thereby providing pro-lifers ample reason to think twice about buying bottled water. In a similar way, the documentary "Food Beware: The French Organic Revolution" brings out how the application of pesticides causes illness in many of those who apply them, as well as in those living in surrounding areas. There are various websites that provide information about environmental concerns, including National Catholic Rural Life Conference (recently renamed, Catholic Rural Life: <http://www.ncrlc.com/>) and the NCCC Eco-Justice Network: <http://www.ncccojustice.org/network/forms/download.html>. Googling "homemade non toxic cleaning products" brings up a couple hundred thousand hits.

¹¹ Agribusiness relies on vast inputs of fertilizer to a far greater extent than most small and mid-size farms, which generally expend effort on maintaining the fertility of the soil. Fertilizer runoff is one of the main causes of the formation of dead zones. See "What Causes Ocean "Dead Zones?," *Scientific American* EarthTalk (25 September 2012), (<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/ocean-dead-zones/>): "Dead zones occur around the world, but primarily near areas where heavy agricultural and industrial activity spill nutrients into the

human well-being by saving fuel and reducing pollution since the produce is not transported long distances. Buying organic food (not to mention other products, such as organic cotton) also helps ensure that people do not suffer from pollution caused by pesticides and nitrogenous waste and that the land will remain capable of bearing crops for future generations.¹²

Another thing that we can do to mitigate unnecessary environmental destruction is to buy Fair Trade products. The Fair Trade movement has as its primary goal paying workers a just wage, a *living wage*.¹³ It

water and compromise its quality accordingly.... Perhaps the most infamous U.S. dead zone is an 8,500 square mile swath (about the size of New Jersey) of the Gulf of Mexico, not far from where the nutrient-laden Mississippi River, which drains farms up and down the Midwest, lets out. Besides decimating the region's once teeming shrimp industry, low oxygen levels in the water there have led to reproductive problems for fish, leading to lack of spawning and low egg counts." There is currently a twelve-state task force whose goal is reducing this dead zone; see <http://www.triplepundit.com/2014/05/new-12-state-task-force-aims-shrink-gulf-mexico-dead-zone-size/>.

¹² Pro-lifers need to reflect on what organic farming is. See Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organic_farming: "Organic farming is the form of agriculture that relies on techniques such as crop rotation, green manure, compost and biological pest control to maintain soil productivity and control pests on a farm. Organic farming uses fertilizers and pesticides but excludes or strictly limits the use of manufactured (synthetic) fertilizers, pesticides (which include herbicides, insecticides and fungicides), plant growth regulators such as hormones, livestock antibiotics, food additives, and genetically modified organisms. Organic agricultural methods are internationally regulated and legally enforced by many nations, based in large part on the standards set by the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Federation_of_Organic_Agriculture_Movements). 'Organic agriculture is a production system that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems and people. It relies on ecological processes, biodiversity and cycles adapted to local conditions, rather than the use of inputs with adverse effects. Organic agriculture combines tradition, innovation and science to benefit the shared environment and promote fair relationships and a good quality of life for all involved.'"

¹³ There is debate about whether Fair Trade certification really ends up ensuring a better wage for the individual farmer. See, for example, Philip Booth and Linda Whetstone, "Half a Cheer for Fair Trade," 26th Institute of Economic Affairs Current Controversies Paper, www.iea.org.uk, and Eric Holt-Giménez, Ian Bailey, and Devon Sampson, Institute for Food Development Policy (2007),

also has as one of its concerns safeguarding the environment by helping to make sure that water resources and fertile soil will be maintained so that future generations can grow food (sustainable agriculture).¹⁴ As noted earlier, sustainably produced products are almost always more costly, and a given family may not be able to afford buying them or at least not many of them.¹⁵ We need to ask ourselves, though, whether the reason why we cannot fit such products into our budget is because we are spending money on things we really do not need. Indeed, we need to realize that consumerism results in the depletion of the earth's resources, the production of pollution and other toxic waste, and many other forms of environmental damage that end up harming people. We need to realize that making judicious purchases may in the long term be effective at saving human lives. Just because we generally cannot see the

Development Report, no. 17, "Fair to the Last Drop: The Corporate Challenges to Fair Trade Coffee," <http://www.foodfirst.org/node/1794>. None of the critics of FT, however, argue that individual farmers on the whole are worse off for being part of a fair trade enterprise.

¹⁴ See "About Fair Trade USA's mission," <http://fairtradeusa.org/about-fair-trade-usa/mission>: "Protecting the environment goes hand-in-hand with protecting the future livelihoods of local communities. The Fair Trade model requires rigorous protection of local ecosystems and ensures that farmers receive a harvest price, which will allow them to practice sustainable agriculture. We encourage farmers to transition to organic agriculture because it is safer for farm workers, healthier for consumers and better for the environment. Ultimately, we help farming families become the best stewards of their land." The international fair trade certification standards explicitly include various forms of protecting the environment; see, for example, Fair Trade Standards for Small Producer Organizations, "http://www.fairtrade.net/fileadmin/user_upload/content/2011-12-27_SPO_EN_FINAL.pdf and http://www.fairtrade.net/fileadmin/user_upload/content/2011-12-27_SPO_EN_FINAL.pdf, 11-20.

¹⁵ Another way to know that one is buying a sustainable produced product is when it is Rainforest Alliance certified: "Rainforest Alliance certification encourages farmers to grow crops and manage ranchlands sustainably. Because our certification system is built on the three pillars of sustainability -- environmental protection, social equity, and economic viability -- and no single pillar can support long-term success on its own, we help farmers improve in all three areas" (<http://www.rainforest-alliance.org/work/agriculture>). Rainforest Alliance certified products are available in many supermarkets.

positive effect that our environmental efforts have on the lives of others in the same way that we can see that initiatives like crisis pregnancy centers do does not mean that they are not effective. Consider, for example, the impact that the use of plastics has on human lives. Plastic-producing industries “emit large amounts of carbon monoxide, dioxin, and hydrogen cyanide. These gaseous pollutants...cause respiratory diseases, nervous system disorders, and immune suppression in human beings.”¹⁶ The documentary “Tapped,” for instance, shows people living near a plastics factory as they recount the negative impact the factory’s pollution has on their health. When pro-lifers use refillable water bottles rather than buying new plastic bottles each time and bringing re-usable shopping bags to the store as substitutes for the plastic ones, they are reducing the demand for the production of plastic with its attendant harms to people’s health. This is one small example of the sort of environmental measures that pro-lifers could incorporate as part of a pro-life life-style. Living by the slogan “reduce, reuse, and recycle” can help to protect human life. Pro-lifers need to take to heart Gandhi’s saying: “we need to live simply, so that others may simply live.”¹⁷

In England parishes and dioceses can become fair-trade certified by serving fair-trade products at parish meetings and promoting their purchase among parishioners.¹⁸ Pro-life groups in America should seriously consider joining this movement as well as serving locally grown products at their meetings and explaining to their members the

¹⁶ B. Victor, “Impact of plastics on the environment,” <http://www.slideshare.net/biotechvictor1950/plastic-impacts-on-the-natural-environment>, slide 29.

¹⁷ We need to heed the words of Benedict XVI: “The way humanity treats the environment influences the way it treats itself, and vice versa. This invites contemporary society to a serious review of its lifestyle...prone to hedonism and consumerism” (*Caritas in veritate* §51).

¹⁸ In Great Britain, to become a Fairtrade Parish, one must: “1. Use Fair trade tea and coffee after services and for all meetings for which one has responsibility. 2. Move forward on using other Fairtrade products (such as sugar, biscuits and fruit).3. Promote Fairtrade during Fairtrade Fortnight and during the year through events, worship and other activities whenever possible.” (<http://www.durham.anglican.org/userfiles/file/Durham%20Website/Archdeacons%20Resources/becoming%20a%20Fairtrade%20Parish.pdf>).

pro-life significance of doing so.

I have addressed at some length the costs to human life that result from bad management of the environment by certain players in the food industry for several reasons. First, it provides a clear example of poor treatment of the environment as linked to disregard for human life and health. Secondly, it is something that pro-life groups can readily inform their members about. They have only to have their members watch *Food Inc.*,¹⁹ a documentary that makes it amply clear that our choices as to what we eat may have a negative impact both on the balance of nature and on human life and health. Thirdly, it is something that pro-lifers, individually and as a group, can readily do something about; we make choices about the food we eat on a daily basis. I am not suggesting that pro-life groups morph into environmental groups, but I am arguing that it is incumbent upon them to do something to cultivate pro-life environmentalism on the part of their members. Talking about the choices we make as to the food we eat is a good place to start.

Political Measures

There is also need to consider pro-life failures in the political arena to support environmental measures that protect human life. The Republican Party's 2008 and 2012 platforms explicitly affirm: "Faithful to the first guarantee of the Declaration of Independence, we assert the inherent dignity and sanctity of all human life and affirm that the unborn child has a fundamental individual right to life that cannot be infringed."²⁰ The Democratic Party has no such plank in its platform (even though individual Democratic politicians are pro-life). Yet Republicans voted "191 times against environmental protections" in the first session of the 112th Congress (2011).²¹ Admittedly, we have reason

¹⁹ *Food Inc.* can be viewed free online at <http://documentaryaddict.com/Food+Inc-2174-doc.html>. The movie "Fresh" also highlight the connection between our treatment of the environment and human health.

²⁰ 2008 Republican Platform, <http://www.gop.com/2008Platform/Values.htm>.

²¹ U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Energy and Commerce, Minority Staff, December 15, 2011, "The Anti-Environment Record of the U.S. House of Representatives 112th Congress, 1st Session," http://democrats.energycommerce.house.gov/sites/default/files/image_uploads/_Anti-Environ

to be skeptical about whether all those “environmental protections” were appropriate. For example, it is certainly debatable whether we need to be spending money on climate change mitigation measures instead of using the money to help people circumvent potential damage and/or to help them if they are adversely affected by climate change. There are many other prudential factors that have to be taken into account in weighing environmental legislation. For example, some environmental measures result in people losing jobs, which in turn may affect their health, for these individuals are less able to afford a healthcare (not to mention suffer other harms resulting from job loss). But some of the environmental measures that pro-life Republicans voted against clearly would have protected human lives. For example, they voted eight times against measures requiring the proper disposal of coal ash.²² What is likely to happen when coal ash is not properly disposed of? Consider the following.

On December 22, 2008, a Tennessee Valley authority coal ash impoundment in Kingston, Tennessee ruptured, releasing more than five million cubic yards of toxic sludge and blanketing the Emory river and 300 acres of surrounding land. As this episode demonstrated, improper disposal of the combustion wastes produced by coal-burning electric utilities can pose a threat to human health and safety. EPA considers 49 coal ash impoundments in 12 states as having “high hazard potential,” which means that a failure in the impoundment is like [sic] to cause loss of human life. Unsafe disposal of coal ash can also threaten drinking water by leaching arsenic and other toxic chemicals into drinking water from unlined surface impoundments.²³

Where were the pro-life concerns of pro-life Republicans when they voted against measures requiring the proper disposal of coal ash?

Another instance in which pro-life Republicans arguably ignored pro-life principles was in a 2011 Senate vote on a bill that would suspend Clean Air Act rules concerning toxic emissions from industrial boilers, cement factories, and waste incineration. Every Republican Senator with one exception voted to suspend them.²⁴

ment%20Report%20Final.pdf, 2.

²² *Ibid.*, 9.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ See Think Progress Green, “Senate GOP Try to Gut Clean Air Act,”

It is a scandal when pro-lifers are forced to choose to vote either for a candidate who is in favor of protecting human life in the womb or for a candidate who is for protecting human life outside the womb via environmental measures. This gives an opening for pro-abortionists to pick off voters who ordinarily would vote for candidates who support protections for the unborn. Pro-lifers have a grave responsibility to teach their children that environmental concerns often are ultimately concerns for the protection of human life. We need to form a generation of future politicians who do not force us to choose the protection of certain human beings over other human beings.

It should also be plain that pro-lifers should be running their farms and businesses in an environmentally sound way, one that respects the health and lives of other people.²⁵ In addition to being a matter of justice, it would also alleviate the pressure put on civic leaders to loosen environmental standards that protect human life.

A Balanced Pro-life Environmental Ethic

Pro-lifers need to embrace a balanced pro-life environmental ethic. There are both religious and non-religious reasons for holding that we have a moral obligation to ensure the integrity of the natural order. For example, the Catholic Church teaches:

<http://thinkprogress.org/green/2011/11/04/361560/senate-gop-try-to-gut-clean-air-act/?mobile=nc>.

²⁵ I acknowledge that sometimes our use of the environment involves tradeoffs in regard to human health, and it is not always easy to determine whether the benefits outweigh the costs or vice versa. For example, the Green Revolution involves the heavy use of pesticides that sometimes adversely affect human health; yet, of course, the Green Revolution keeps people from starving. In present-day China, burning coal for electricity causes pollution that seriously affects human health; yet doing so improves these people lives in numerous ways. Just as in the development of pharmaceuticals a judgment has to be made as to whether the benefit a drug may offer to a patient outweighs its possible side-effects; so too, prudential decisions need to be made as to whether a given use of the environment helps people more than it harms them. This being said, there are environmental problems impacting upon human health that people create unnecessarily, but solely to increase profit or to enhance comfort, etc.

Each creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection. For each one of the works of the “six days” it is said: “And God saw that it was good.” “By the very nature of creation, material being is endowed with its own stability, truth and excellence, its own order and laws.” Each of the various creatures, willed in its own being, reflects in its own way a ray of God's infinite wisdom and goodness. Man must therefore respect the particular goodness of every creature, to avoid any disordered use of things that would be in contempt of the Creator and would bring disastrous consequences for human beings and their environment.²⁶

Secular environmentalists generally do not invoke theistic reasons for holding that we should respect nature. They do, however, articulate various arguments for the intrinsic goodness of nature, from which they derive an obligation on our part to care for it. Both theist and non-theist thinkers can agree that there is reason to protect the environment beyond its impact on our survival and material well-being, namely, because biodiversity and ecosystems are goods that are worthy of respect.

It is unfortunate when pro-lifers and especially high-profile pro-life figures caricature the concerns of secular environmentalists instead of taking the opportunity to present a balanced environmental ethic. For example, in a recent newsletter, Steven Mosher of the Population Research Institute, an institute renowned for its pro-life work, portrays this as a typical lament of environmentalists who advocate population control: “We are overfishing the ocean commons. Mass extinctions of commercially valuable fish are just around the corner. We will all starve.”²⁷ But what environmentalist claims that we are all going to starve because we have overfished the oceans? Moreover, Mosher speaks as if the disappearance of ocean fisheries would be inconsequential, when in fact it would have a negative impact on the lives of the human beings who earn their living by ocean fishing, not to mention on the lives of the people who eat the fish, for fish provide about seven percent of the total protein consumed worldwide.

Mosher talks as if aquaculture offers an adequate solution to this

²⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Washington DC: U.S. Catholic Conference, 1997) §339.

²⁷ Steven W. Mosher, “Seven Billion Reasons to Celebrate: PRI Welcomes Baby Seven Billion at the National Press Club,” *Population Research Institute Review* 21/6 (November-December 2011): 10.

problem. There are, however, a number of reasons why this is not so. First, ocean fishermen do not morph overnight into pisciculturalists. It is not easy for a person who has grown up in a fishing family to find another job, either psychologically speaking or from the point of view of possessing skills that are largely non-transferable. Secondly, fish raised on fish farms do not necessarily end up on the plates of those hitherto eating free-living ocean fish. It is not always that easy to find alternate sources of protein, and “protein deficiency is a common cause of ill health and death in developing countries.”²⁸ Thirdly, the nutritional value of farmed fish is generally inferior to ocean fish. Much research shows the importance of omega-3 fatty acids in our diet, but “farm-raised fish provide less usable omega-3 fats.”²⁹ Worse yet, farmed-raised fish contain considerably more cancer-causing PCBs.³⁰ Fourth, pisciculture brings with it its own environmental problems if not properly practiced.³¹

Mosher goes on to say: “Certainly the wild fish stocks, which ‘graze’ in the vast commons of the oceans, can be better managed to maximize yield....” Here Mosher shows some concern for proper stewardship, but there still remains a problem in speaking solely in terms of “yield” and never about species protection. Wild fish should not be regarded as merely a commodity for human consumption. Again, from the Judeo-Christian perspective, all of creation is “good” and the whole “very good,” and God put us “in the garden of Eden to work it and to take care of it” (Gen. 2:15). Thus, to cause extinction unnecessarily is to fail to execute our charge. Accordingly, Catholic Social teaching maintains that

²⁸ Wikipedia, “Protein (nutriment),” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protein_%28nutriment%29.

²⁹ The George Mateljan Foundation, “Is there any nutritional difference between wild-caught and farm-raised fish? Is one type better for me than the other?” <http://www.whfoods.com/genpage.php?tname=george&dbid=96>.

³⁰ See *ibid.*: “When farmed salmon from U.S. grocery stores was tested, the farmed salmon, which contains up to twice the fat of wild salmon, was found to contain 16 times the PCBs found in wild salmon, 4 times the levels in beef, and 3.4 times the levels found in other seafood. Other studies done in Canada, Ireland and Britain have produced similar findings (Sept. 8, 2003).”

³¹ See *ibid.* and Wikipedia, “Salmon,” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salmon>.

The variety of forms of God's creatures – biodiversity – is one of the gifts of the Creator that we must cherish. The Fathers and theologians of the Church were convinced that the diversity of creatures was essential to show forth the glory of God: no creature can adequately reveal God to us but the very great variety of created beings does better at this than any single species. Thus, if we cause the extinction of species, we are diminishing the glory of God.³²

Secular environmentalists such as biologist E.O. Wilson generally maintain that “each species is unique and intrinsically valuable, and biological diversity must be treated as an invaluable global resource – to be indexed, used and above all, preserved.”³³ When people see pro-life advocates regarding natural beings as simply raw materials that have no value apart from the purposes for which we use them,³⁴ they are rightly turned off. This can have a negative impact on the pro-life movement. For example, it is easy to see how the advertisement on

³² Indiana Catholic Conference, “Care for the Earth,” May 2000, http://conservation.catholic.org/bishops_from_around_the_world_ii.htm. See also “Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching.” Washington DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1991, 7: “The diversity of life manifests God's glory. Every creature shares a bit of the divine beauty. Because the divine goodness could not be represented by one creature alone, Aquinas tells us, God ‘produced many and diverse creatures, so that what was wanting to one in representation of the divine goodness might be supplied by another.... Hence the whole universe together participates in the divine goodness more perfectly, and represents it better than any single creature whatever’ (*Summa theologiae* I, 48 ad 1). The wonderful variety of the natural world is, therefore, part of the divine plan and, as such invites our respect. Accordingly, it is appropriate that we treat other creatures and the natural world not just as means to human fulfillment, but also as God's creatures, possessing an independent value, worthy of our respect and care.”

³³ E.O. Wilson Biodiversity Foundation, “What is Biodiversity?” <http://eo.wilsonfoundation.org/what-is-biodiversity>.

³⁴ See Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate* §48: “Nature expresses a design of love and truth. It is prior to us, and it has been given to us by God as the setting for our life. Nature speaks to us of the Creator (cf. Rom 1:20) and his love for humanity. It is destined to be “recapitulated” in Christ at the end of time (cf. Eph 1:9-10; Col. 1:19-20). Thus, it too is a “vocation.” Nature is at our disposal not as “a heap of scattered refuse,” but as a gift of the Creator who has given it an inbuilt order, enabling man to draw from it the principles needed in order “to till it and keep it” (Gen 2:15).

Spanish talk radio informing us that polls indicate that the vast majority of Hispanics are in favor of protecting biodiversity can be used to persuade members of this ostensibly pro-life group to vote for candidates hostile to life in the womb. The failure to champion a balanced environmental ethic thus involves a failure to embrace the truth and hinders the advancement of pro-life causes.