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The Environment**The Mirror Side of the Rapport between God and Humanity**

Emeka NWOSUH, O.P.

1. Introduction

Issues or questions relating to the environment could be considered as one of the major burning topics that dominate contemporary local and global public debate. For several decades now there has been a growing public awareness, concern and even alarm over the safety of our planet arising from serious environmental threats which are often tied to an unbalanced, unhealthy and even dangerous exploitation and the consequent degradation of the environment by the human species. Fundamental and critical questions are therefore being posed as to what ought to be the nature of the relationship between man and the environment (or nature in general) in the light of the crises resulting from the present unsatisfactory rapport between man and the environment. What originally appeared to have been a cause championed by various environmentalist lobby groups has gradually claimed the interest and attention of scholars in various fields of academic discipline and not surprisingly of politicians and world leaders too. In fact, environmental issues have acquired such a political weight that it has become a touchstone that can make or break the political fortunes of any major political office holder or aspirant to high political office. For this reason, therefore, many political leaders and political aspirants, even if not for genuine environmental concerns, are constrained to take or at least pretend to take real interest in questions or issues regarding the environment.¹⁸⁹ In fact, several international conferences have been held by world leaders to discuss and formulate global policies pertaining to the

¹⁸⁹ Cf. L-A. Broadhead, *International Environmental Politics: The Limits of Green Diplomacy*, London: Lynne Rienner, 2002; K. Conca & G. D. Dabelko, *Green Planet Blues: Environmental Politics from Stockholm to Tyoto*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1998.

environment. Very often, such international conferences are at the promptings or initiatives of several local, regional and international environmental movements,¹⁹⁰ such as the Greenpeace International,¹⁹¹ World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF, formerly known as World Wildlife Fund),¹⁹² which have formed themselves into very powerful pressure or lobby groups that influence public opinions and consequently shape and even determine major public policies regarding environmental and related issues. In a way, the environmental question has come to occupy both an importance and a space in the public discourse which demands some form of intellectual engagement or dialogue with every sphere of human knowledge or discipline.

Thus, even the faith community and theology as a discipline is held bound to offer their own insights and contributions to this global discourse on the environment. Speaking in the name of the Christian community and the Catholic community in particular, Pope John Paul II, concludes his message thus:

I should like to address directly my brothers and sisters in the Catholic Church, in order to remind them of their serious obligation to care for all creation. The commitment of believers to a healthy environment for everyone stems directly from their belief in God the Creator, from their recognition of the effects of original and personal sin, and from the certainty of having been redeemed by Christ. 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 (cf. Ps 148:96).¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰ Cf. R. V. Bartlett et al., (eds.), *International Organizations and Environmental Policy*, Westport, Connecticut/London: Greenwood Press, 1995, p2; T. Princen & M. Finger, *Environmental NGOs in World Politics: Linking the Local and the Global*, New York: Routledge, 1994.

¹⁹¹ On their official international website, the Greenpeace International outlines a number of victories with regard to governmental policies that would mitigate the adverse effects on the environment arising from economic and industrial activities both at the global, regional and local levels.

Cf. <http://www.greenpeace.org/international/about/victories>

¹⁹² The WWF outlines as its ultimate goal the building a future where people can live in harmony with nature. Cf. <http://www.wwf.org>

¹⁹³ Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Peace With God the Creator, Peace with all of Creation*, Message of His

This expectation is made even more urgent by the fact that the Judeo-Christian tradition is often viewed with a certain suspicion and in fact indicted as a prime culprit in the "crime" against the environment. The Christian response, which is oftentimes limited to exculpating itself from this indictment, must, however, reach back to the wealth of its early Christian tradition and theology to find and make meaningful and satisfactory contributions to the ongoing public discourse on the environment.¹⁹⁴ It is in the light of this that we offer a brief insight into the environmental question from the view point of the second century anti-Gnostic opponent, Irenaeus, the Bishop of Lyons. His theology of creation provides us a theological basis for a Christian perspective into the environmental problem. Prior to the exposition of the thought of Irenaeus, it is necessary to include in this introduction an exposition of different assessments of human relationship with the environment.

2. Anthropocentrism: The Root of the Environmental Problem?

That the human being is at the root of the present-day environmental crises is an undeniable creed amongst environmentalists (and even non-environmentalists) of whatever shade or spectrum. The deforestation of vast acres of tropical forests in Africa, Asia and the Amazon regions of South America is usually tied to the aggressive exploitation of these forest resources and reserves for human economic benefit; the depletion

Holiness for the celebration of the World Day of Peace, January 1, 1990. In this brief message, John Paul II, with much insights and dexterity, articulates succinctly what represents a valid Christian response and contribution to the ecological discourse. What is of note here is that most of the insights present in his message has Irenaeus tone or ring to it, particularly when he speaks of the intimate rapport between God, man and creation. This is undoubtedly Irenaeus even if it is not explicitly indicated.

¹⁹⁴ A number of authors that try to present a Christian perspective to the environmental question include: B. Anderson, *From Creation to New Creation*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994); T. vanBavel, "The Creator and the Integrity of Creation in the Fathers of the Church, Especially in Augustine." *Augustinian Studies* 21 (1990), pp1-33; R. L. Fern, *Nature, God, and Humanity: Envisioning an Ethics of Nature*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002; P. Harrison, "Subduing the Earth: Genesis 1, Early Modern Science, and the Exploitation of Nature." *Journal of Religion* 79 (1999) 86-109; M. Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

of the ozone layer is likewise associated with human mammoth economic millwheel, which unceasingly churns out and discharges into the atmosphere tons of gases, including green house gases that has led to severe climate changes especially in the form of global warming. As a consequence of rising temperature, large packs of glacier and icebergs in the Arctic and Antarctic regions have shrunk in size and continues to do so. The human fast growing population, with its consequent needs, has increased the pressure on the earth's resources leading to an accelerated depletion of large amount of non-renewable natural resources and the distortion of the natural balance in the ecosystem and a noxious variation of the biodiversity in both aquatic and faunal life which in some instances has led or contributed significantly to the extinction of some plant and animal species. In a nutshell, the widely held opinion is that, man's direct and indirect activities on the environment has contributed most significantly to the latter's impoverishment and degradation.¹⁹⁵ Indeed, some could go as far as characterizing human relationship with the environment as one marked by a certain kind of aggression or violence. Human aggression towards the environment has not however left the latter utterly indifferent or helpless as it sometimes fights back in cruel reprisals in what Janet Abramovitz calls 'unnatural disasters'.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ It could indeed be said that in impoverishing his environment, man is himself likewise impoverished, despite the economic and technological success that often accompanies or rather characterizes his exploitation and use of the earth's resources.

¹⁹⁶ J. Abramovitz, "Are Humans to Blame for Exacerbating Many Natural Disasters?", *USA Today (Society for the Advancement of Education)*, vol. 130, July 2002. In her article, Abramovitz distinguishes between natural and unnatural disasters. Most natural "disasters" e.g. flooding, wildfires, etc., are part of the natural mechanism to reestablish and maintain equilibrium in nature or in the environment. A healthy ecosystem, she argues, has inbuilt mechanisms to contain and mitigate these natural "disasters". In fact, such "disasters" are necessary for the continued vitality of the ecosystem. For this reason, therefore, they are not strictly speaking disasters. Abramovitz prefers to call them natural disturbances. There are, however, many disasters which are not natural, because they are the dire consequence of an ecosystem which has been greatly destabilized and thus lost its natural capacity to automatically regulate the cycles of natural disturbances that form part of its normal regime. For example, the destruction of coastal wetlands, dunes and mangroves eliminates natural shock absorbers for coastal storms which increase the possibility of disasters such as that caused by Hurricane Katrina or the Tsunami. Abramovitz is of the conviction that such magnitude of danger would not have occurred if man does not dramatically displace the internal mechanisms which nature has put in place for the purpose of auto-regulation and auto-adjustment.

2.1 *The Judeo-Christian Tradition Roots of the Human Forma Mentis*

If human beings relate to their environment in a manner that is characteristically domineering and aggressive, it is usually argued, it is owing to an entrenched spirit of anthropocentrism which has characterized the *forma mentis* of the western culture, history and civilization. The formation and endorsement of such an anthropocentric outlook,¹⁹⁷ some would insist, is rooted in the Judeo-Christian religious tradition with particular reference to the creation story in which Adam was not only constituted the crown of creation but was also directed to subdue and have dominion/rule over the rest of creation (Gen 1:26-28).¹⁹⁸ These two imperative verbs are said to provide the hermeneutics for interpreting and understanding human aggressiveness and even ruthlessness towards the environment. These, some claim, are the most damning evidence that confirms ineluctably the culpability of the Christian tradition with regards to the ecological crises. This classical indictment is said to be best articulated by Lynn White, Jr. who insists that the Christian faith bears a huge burden of guilt for the contemporary environmental or ecological crises of our planet.¹⁹⁹ Several Christian writers have understandably rejected such reading and interpretation of the Genesis story as rather simplistic, one-sided and unmindful of the full context of the Creation account and indeed of the sum total Christian teachings regarding creation. But there are some who insists that the challenge posed by these

¹⁹⁷ It need be pointed out that even long before the emergence of the Christian tradition which no doubt has its root in the older Jewish tradition, the Greek intellectual, i.e. philosophical culture advocates and upholds an anthropocentric perspective with regards to nature. Thus, that the ultimate purpose of the whole of creation and the earth on which we live is to serve humanity, a notion that was widely held in antiquity. Cf. Aristotle, *Politics* I, 1256 b 15-25; Pliny, *Natural History*, VII, I. There were however dissensions to this view in the opinions of the Stoics and the Epicureans.

¹⁹⁸ On the basis of the etymological analysis on the two Hebrew vocabularies employed in the above directive, J. J. Boersema concludes that the harsh undertone in both the meaning and usage of these words is unavoidable and therefore renders unsustainable the attempt by some modern authors to offer a more benign interpretation of these words in which case God's directive to man is merely understood as a directive to manage or care for the land. Boersema nevertheless believes that one can still arrive at the original intent of God, i.e. what He does mean by subdue and rule over the land, if one reads this passage in the light of Gen. 1:29,30 where God lays down the dietary rule for man. Cf. Jan, J. Boersema, *The Torah and the Stoics on Humankind and Nature: A Contribution to the Debate on Sustainability and Quality*, Boston: Brill, 2001, pp61-75.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. L. White, Jr., 'The Historic Roots of our Ecologic Crises', *Science* 155 (1967) 1203-1207.

critics cannot simply be brushed aside. According to Daniel Migliorebs,

it would be a mistake to react in a purely defensive way to the criticism of the Christian theological tradition as unfriendly to the natural environment. As numerous studies have shown, negative and domineering attitudes toward the body and the physical world are present in many strands of Christian theology and even in the Bible itself.²⁰⁰ Feminist theologians have underscored the link between the hierarchy of male over female and that of humanity over nature. Such attitudes have offered little theological resistance to the spirit of conquest that has characterized the relationship of humanity to the natural environment in Western history. Torn out of its biblical context, the divine command to humanity to have dominion over the earth has been twisted into an ideology of mastery. There is, therefore, ample reason for Christians to repent of their complicity in the abuse of the environment and for Christian theology to engage in serious self-criticism.²⁰¹

3. *The Human Being and Creation in Irenaeus*

It is important to point out from the outset that in no place in either of his extant works, the *Adversus Haereses* and the *Epideixis*, does the bishop of Lyons concern himself or even directly raise the question

²⁰⁰ This interpretation is the irresistible attraction of Christians down the ages whose vision of faith is one that is less flexible, i.e., those who are often inclined to a rigid or radical interpretation of the Christian faith which more often than not leads to a sharp contrast or even conflict between matter and spirit, soul and body, heaven and earth, etc. This vision of faith is in some way on the other influenced by a vision or conception of God opposed or at best reluctantly tolerant of matter and all that is connected with matter. This is most evident in the conflict between Irenaeus and the Gnostics. Irenaeus' vision of a God who is intimately and lovely connected with Creation gives a different hue to the Christian faith and morals. Whereas, the Gnostics vision of God gives a different color.

²⁰¹ D. Migliorebs, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 2nd ed., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004, pp93-94. See also H. P. Santmire, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985 and also R. R. Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1983.

that could in any way be said to be related to what is considered today as the environmental or the ecological question. And so we will not try to dress up Irenaeus as an ecofriendly theologian or an early Christian environmentalist; nor will we try to make his writings appear as a sort of handbook that provides direct indications, however inchoate, for resolving today's environmental issues. Nevertheless, Irenaeus' thought remains a very rich and sound theological source for understanding and articulating the environmental questions from a theological perspective and consequently, proffering answers which are authentically and distinctively Christian. A Christian perspective to the environmental problem could indeed serve as a springboard for dialogue and an apostolic mission to the contemporary world given that the environmental problem is not unconnected with the question of man's relationship with God, as we shall subsequently demonstrate from Irenaeus' point of view. Thus, the Christian contribution is one that elevates or rather broadens the perimeter of this discourse from one that is merely socio-political to one that extends to the religious and spiritual dimension, which is of no less significance to the discourse. Though considered a part of the problem rather than an unprejudiced interlocutor, the Christian faith retains the right to make a contribution to the ongoing public discourse on the environment.

Irenaeus' conception of creation is entirely positive. Such a perspective or outlook is but a logical consequence of his insistence that creation is the direct and personal handiwork of God who formed and shaped or molded creation by means of His Two Hands. Thus, in affirming God as the direct Artificer or Architect of creation, Irenaeus, in contrast with his Gnostic and Marcionite opponents, lays a firm foundation or speaking more accurately, secures and upholds the basis for a positive Christian evaluation of creation. Irenaeus' affirmation of the goodness of Creation is indeed nothing but a reaffirmation of that which the Book of Genesis had already declared or proclaimed, viz.: God saw all that He made and it was indeed very good (Gen 1:31). It can, therefore, be held that in combating the Gnostics and Marcionites, Irenaeus sought to undermine and demolish their theological principles or

hypotheses as he called them which, among other things, was inclined towards a negative and pessimistic conception and evaluation of creation. It is obvious that the Gnostics' separation of creation from God and the consequent estimation of matter as evil or negative create the ideal milieu that nurtures and sustains an attitude which is less reverential and protective of creation. The logical question would be: why conserve or preserve creation if it bears within itself the principle of evil? Matter, the Gnostics sustain, is doomed to perish. There is, in other words, no *telos* for material substances. On the other hand, a perception of creation as the bearer of the Spirit of God and the locus or context of the action of the Incarnate Word, as sustained by Irenaeus, offers a greater and better possibility for forming a positive and reverential attitude towards the environment and creation in general. If, as Miglors had pointed out, there are strong traces of negative and domineering attitudes toward the body and the physical world in many strands of Christian theology, this would largely even if not exclusively be attributed to early heretical influences like Gnosticism, Marcionism, and later on in the centuries, Manichaeism. As we had already pointed out above, there has and there will always be the temptation to oppose spirit and matter, soul and body, the eternal and the temporal, etc, with its consequent denigration of what is not spiritual or heavenly.²⁰² Admittedly, even when the Church formally rejects such sharp and radical oppositions, she does not fully succeed in extirpating such mode of thought from her ecclesial *corpus*. Hence, often times, such mode of thought unconsciously and even significantly influence her interpretation and approach to issues, such as that of the environment. But the fact remains that an authentic and balanced comprehension of the Christian revelation, such as Irenaeus offers us, demonstrates that the Christian faith is fundamentally receptive of the material world. This is an

²⁰² This is very often reflected in very rigid and harsh moral and ascetic practices which aim at distancing oneself as far as possible the "corrupting" influences of the material or temporal world or on the contrary, could be reflected in a libertinism in which there is a denigrating use of the things of the material world. We find both extremes of behavior in the different Gnostic sects. Irenaeus gives a graphic description of the libertinism of Marcus and his followers (cf. AHI, 13, 1-6), while he mocks the asceticism of the Valentinians. Such extreme and negative attitude could well be said to extend to the whole of Creation and the environment in particular.

inescapable implication of an affirmation of God as Creator. This, as Irenaeus labors to demonstrate to his opponents, is the fundamental confession of the prophets, Christ and the apostles. Thus, he follows very strictly and closely the teachings of Scripture.

3.1 *Anthropocentrism in Irenaeus*

Following closely along the lines of the biblical, Judeo-Christian tradition means that Irenaeus likewise places the human being at the very core or heart of creation. There is, in other words, an unmistakable presence of anthropocentrism. Creation, Irenaeus points out, is suited to the wants of man; for man was not made for its sake, but creation for the sake of man.²⁰³ The human being, therefore, is the crown of God's creation. As observed earlier, anthropocentrism is alleged to be at the root of the ravaging of the environment by humans. One therefore could imply that Irenaeus' anthropocentrism does in some way or the other promote an attitude towards the rest of creation which is far from respectful. But Irenaeus' anthropocentrism is not one that in any way belittles or denigrates the rest of creation. Other than being ordered towards human use and benefit, Irenaeus conceives creation as having its own intrinsic value which is not dependent or deriving from the human person but rather dependent on the will of God. As Irenaeus points out, all things that have been made had a beginning when they were formed. They endure as long as God wills that they should have an existence and continuance.²⁰⁴ Thus, every single thing in creation has its own place and specific purpose because with great wisdom and diligence, all things have clearly been made by God, fitted and prepared for their specific purposes.²⁰⁵ What dominates in Irenaeus' concept of creation is the idea of harmony of which the human being is a part. Irenaeus' insistence that man is the crown of God's creation is less about his relationship with the rest of creation than his relationship with God, i.e., he bears in himself the image and likeness of God. This is what makes him stand out from the rest of creation, yet he does not stand apart from the rest of creation. He

²⁰³ Cf. AH V, 29.1.

²⁰⁴ Cf. AH II, 34.3.

²⁰⁵ Cf. AH II, 25.1.

remains one of the keys or musical notes that make up the melody of creation. Indeed, the human person could be considered as the principle key or note of the music, yet he needs the rest of the notes or keys to produce a pleasant melody.²⁰⁶ Thus, what prevails in Irenaeus' notion of creation is the notion of intercommunion and mutual cooperation than the notion of hierarchy or domination. In fact it is interesting to note that in nowhere in his major work, *Adversus Haereses*, does Irenaeus cite the text in which God instructs man to dominate and rule over the rest of Creation (cf. Gen 1: 28).²⁰⁷ he does, however, cite this passage once in the eleventh paragraph of the *Epideixis*. Thus, in Irenaeus' thought, human centrality and primacy in creation is not to be perceived or understood as a license to lord it over the rest of creation.

4. The Dysfunctionality in Creation

Irenaeus' conception of creation as essentially ordered and harmonious does not, however, imply that he is oblivious of the disorder, disharmony and violence which characterizes or marks the ordinary or rather actual rapport within Creation. Irenaeus does pay attention to the problem of evil which introduces disequilibrium in the otherwise harmonious nature. The question of evil is conceptualized primarily as human disobedience or rebellion against the Creator.²⁰⁸ In refusing to follow or obey the voice of God, man separated himself from his Maker bringing along with this several and severe consequences. Irenaeus articulates these consequences thus: man, by departing from God, reached such pitch of fury as even to look upon his brother as his enemy, and engaged without fear in every kind of restless conduct, and murder, and avarice.²⁰⁹ Man's disobedience meant, therefore, separation

²⁰⁶ See AH II, 25.2 where Irenaeus describes Creation employing the imagery of a lyre whose different strings in unison produce a harmonious and pleasant tune or melody, a harmony that has its source from a single lyrist, God.

²⁰⁷ Irenaeus makes reference to this passage thrice (AH III, 22.4; IV, 11.1 38.3), but he only cites the first part of this passage, i.e. "Be fruitful and multiply"; he does not cite at the other half of the passage, "fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over..."

²⁰⁸ Cf. AH IV, 39.1. Irenaeus does not speculate about the origin of evil but he speaks of the introduction of evil in the world employing the parable of enemy who sowed tares among wheat while men were fast asleep. According to him, the apostate angel, i.e. the enemy, because he was envious of God's workmanship, sowed enmity between God and man. Cf. AH IV, 40.3.

²⁰⁹ AH IV, 24.2.

from God, and separation from God is death, and separation from light is darkness; and separation from God consists in the loss of all the benefits which He has in store.²¹⁰ Death is thus the ultimate consequence of the disintegration of the harmonious rapport between the Creator and mankind. Man, became not only for himself the source of death but also spread death to fellow creatures like himself. This is what Irenaeus meant when he observed that man not only looked upon the brother as an enemy and but also engaged in every kind of restless conduct, murder and avarice. In altering the rapport with God, the human being in one breath altered the rapport with fellow human beings and with the environment. It is, thus, within the context of an alteration in the rapport between God and man that we must examine and interpret the hostile rapport between the human person and the environment. By being separated from the Creator, man introduced death, i.e. violence and destruction to his environment.

The altered status in the human relationship with God offers an important hermeneutic for a comprehensive understanding and interpretation of God's command to rule and subdue the earth. What emerges from such a nuanced reading and interpretation is the absence of death and violence prior to human separation from God. Boersema sustains this view, observing that shortly after the command to rule and subdue the earth, God gave human beings, for their food, the fruits and the plants of the field (cf. Gen 1:29). This, according to him, envisages a situation in which there is no death in human relations, nor in relations among the animals themselves who have the green plants to feed on. On the basis of this passage, Boersema opines that in the idealized picture sketched by the author of Genesis, it seems arguable that there existed (can exist) a relationship with nature whereby the 'dominion' was (is) still as the Creator intended, i.e. without death and violence or hostility, in contrast to the dominion that, in the actual world of the author (as well as ours), has a predominantly harsh undertone: harsh, because

²¹⁰ AH V, 27.2; IV, 39.1.

it is accompanied by death, degradation and exploitation when it comes to the animal kingdom and the earth and harsh, also, because it has come to extend to inter-human relations too, where it originally has no place in the eyes of the author of Gen 1.²¹¹ The bishop of Lyons offers us an indication that sustains this view. Commenting on Isaiah's prophecy of the harmonious eschatological period,²¹² Irenaeus remarks that: it is right that when creation is restored, all the animals should obey, and in subjection to man, revert to the food originally given. Reverting to the food originally given implies that there will be absence of killing or shedding blood, in other words, there will be banishment of violence, hostility and death which marks the relationship between man and the rest of creation and among creatures themselves. A restored creation implies or entails a harmonious and respectful coexistence in which there is no longer enmity. However, the harmony in creation must first be preceded by a restoration of harmony between God and man. The walls of enmity which separates the human being from God must first be broken. God and mankind must be and remain in friendship before mankind and creation (the environment) can truly be friends. Therefore, the nature and depth of human relationship with God determines the character, tenor and spirit of human relationship with the environment. It is only to the extent that man united with God allows himself to be filled by the goodness, the love and benevolence of his Creator that man can reflect these in his rapport with his environment. The human being, therefore, serves as a canal through which the rest of creation enjoys the goodness, love and benevolence of God. Man's primacy in Creation is, therefore, no

²¹¹ Cf. J. Boersema, *The Torah and the Stoics*, p73. One can indeed sustain this view on the basis of the altered interpersonal relationship between Adam and Eve shortly after they had disobeyed God's instruction. Adam's accusatory and perhaps resentful tone towards Eve is unmistakable or undisguised. This points to a strain in relationship which is markedly different from the earlier relationship that was marked by harmony, love and completeness. Careful note should be taken of Adam's attempt at distancing himself from Eve. She is now less seen as "mine" (the flesh of my flesh and the bone of my bones); she is now seen more as God's (the woman whom you gave me). She is now seen more as a stumbling block than a companion. The air of friendship between Adam and Eve is soiled because man has first soiled the air of friendship with God. Like a chain effect the rest of Creation will be enveloped in this polluted air that would wrought nothing else but harm.

²¹² "The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, but dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain" (Isa 65:25).

threat to the rest of creation. What threatens creation is man's separation from God, enmity with the Creator. When man is separated from God, man suffers and the earth suffers too. Very strong and prominent, therefore, in Irenaeus' thought is the intimate link between the human person and creation. The survival and fecundity of creation (the environment) is inseparably linked with the human person. Creation is indeed fruitful because man is blessed, but man is richly blessed only if he remains in intimate union with his Creator who ungrudgingly and richly pours out his gift on mankind.

5. Conclusion

On the strength of Irenaeus' insight, it is evident that the environmental question is one that has far deeper significance and value than perhaps is attributed to it. It is a question that is *anthropotheological* in nature since it places in perspective the rapport between God and human beings. This implies that mankind cannot resolve the problem of the environment while excluding God as a principal interlocutor. In a similar vein, mankind cannot resolve the problems of poverty, war, injustice etc while excluding God from the dialogue. Pope John Paul II succinctly articulates this point when he pointed out that: if man is not at peace with God, the earth cannot be at peace.²¹³ The anthropotheological approach to the environmental question underscores the limitation of the often widely held position that finding solutions to environmental degradation is ultimately a question of human behavior and a political will. It involves every citizen.²¹⁴ Perhaps, through political and other social or human action, human beings may succeed in attenuating the problems arising from the environmental crisis, yet they may never fully succeed in dispersing the dark clouds that continue to hover above since without bringing into the discourse the "God dimension" every solution proposed remains fragile and temporary. As long as human beings remain in a fragile or even hostile relationship

²¹³ John Paul II, "Peace with God the Creator".

²¹⁴ D. Oyeshola, *Politics of International Environmental Regulations*, Ibadan: Daily Graphics Production, 1998, pxiv.

with their Creator, they will relate with even greater fragility and hostility with their environment. In a nutshell, the theology of the bishop of Lyons, particularly his insistence on God as Creator and the human being as created, implies that the latter cannot offer to others, including the environment, the benefits of peace, justice, respect, harmony etc if they do not remain in perpetual communion and harmony with their Creator who is the Fount and Author of peace, justice, and harmony.