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Loving the Earth is to Love the Poor

John McCarthy | Feb. 19, 2013 NCR Today

President Obama?s Inaugural Address and State of the Union gave the American people a view of his ?all-of-the-above? energy policy. Republicans called it alienating and unrealistic, while Democrats heralded the President for bringing sustainable energy to the forefront. Though this tension exists along party-lines, Catholics can play an important role in our country?s?and more broadly our world?s?environmental future.

As populations expand and the environment responds with deforestation, water depletion, and decrease in agricultural production we see the disturbing human realities of climate change Mass exoduses and large immigration can often lead to ethnic disputes and cultural disruptions, thus expanding the reach of environmental impact even further.

The ?least of these? among us are bearing the economic costs of climate change the most. The developed world need not worry about infertility of soil, because we can ship in food from other sources. We need not worry about water pollution, because our drinking water is filtered ten-times-over. As Catholics we must understand the moral underpinnings of these realities and see the environment not simply as climate, but as the sustaining background for the whole human race.

The Holy father beautifully explains the environmental gap between the developed and underdeveloped world in *Caritas in Veritate. ?*Questions linked to the care and preservation of the environment today need to give due consideration to the energy problem. The fact that some States, power groups and companies hoard non-renewable energy resources represents a grave obstacle to development in poor countries. Those countries lack the economic means either to gain access to existing sources of nonrenewable energy to finance research into new alternatives. The stockpiling of natural resources, which in many cases are found in the poor countries themselves, gives rise to exploitation and frequent conflicts between and within nations.?

Our God is a Green God. There, I said it. The Catholic Church has a well-articulated stance on humanity?s role in stewardship?one that the laity is often unaware of. Lay Catholics must be the ones to step up and show that we are informed by our faith?and environmental protection is one of our priorities. The book of proverbs calls us to ?speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, Judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and the needy.? It is about time that we let the world know that stewardship is more than tree-hugging and protests: it is about elevating the dignity of all God?s creation in a holistic way.

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