BIOLOGY AND FAITH

Biology and Faith are two marvelous aspects of the majesty, wisdom and love of God. Biology deals with a specially rich aspect of Creation – life, which in itself manifests one of the greatest gifts of God, as something more close to Himself in the Creation’s ordinance. Faith is the essential bridge between His creatures and their participation in the understanding of the greater meaning of their very Creation. Also, Faith enables a decision regarding this understanding, and so rises the created beyond the creation to a conscious union with the Creator. And, the relationship between Biology and Faith leads to the idea of harmony between reason and Faith, the “two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth” (John Paul II, Encyclical Letter Fides et Ratio), which exalt and dignify both. The relationship between Biology, particularly associated with environmental matters, and between Faith have many developments, already approached by the Church, that will be further mentioned. But before, a brief consideration of each one is appropriate.

Biology has a kind of dignity of its own, as its proper subject is life itself, as mentioned above. Scientifically, life poses the amazing problem that it cannot be well defined: in fact, life is recognized by some well known characteristics; it manifests itself; but it doesn’t have a formula by which it can be described. And this fact has at least two interesting consequences. First, all the rigorous scientific biological labor evolves upon something that is conceptually inconsistent – a paradox. We can recall the fact that a dead body eventually is essentially the same as itself before natural death (at least most forms), except for… not being alive; and also the strange fact that some organic functions may persist after undeniable death – as beard growth in man. Second, and as a consequence of the first, an honest philosophical approach reasonably directs the idea of life to a sphere other than the material world and its physical-chemical laws. This opens the way to the transcendent – and usually also to savage academic discussions, that will be bypassed here. Anyway, Biology, in studying life, has to consider all its related complexities; as well as all forms of life, even its philosophical - or so - connections.

Faith, as a grace of God, presupposes the kind of intelligence that only human beings have, a
differential that – as life itself – directs to something beyond the material circumscription (i.e., the soul). Only humans can believe, and act freely accordingly, in what they cannot see or materially experience, or even fully know and understand. By Faith, it can be reached the true and ultimate meaning (and the right links) of life – science – Biology – creation – relations with God, the self, the other human beings and creatures, in short: the reason of existence and the role of humanity. Human beings are the only believing beings; this is a unique characteristic, which put humankind in an ascended intermediate step between God above and the other corporeal creatures below.

So, body life with transcendent perceptive intelligence, or human life, is a unique case of “intermediary organism” – that encloses biology and faith, the union of both producing a material reality that runs to transcendental life. This, as will be seen, has consequences not only for individuals, but also as a major, whole organized life form.

Biology and Faith relationships are summarized in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, keyed by the perspective of the serious current environmental problems. To better situate ourselves, the main points of this document will follow. The fundamental assertion is that the Catholic faith has the clear comprehension that the action of Man over nature must follow God’s plan for both, as exposed in the Bible (cf. *Gen 1:26-30*). It means that, by God’s edict, Man must subjugate the earth, developing its potentialities to the human benefit, but at same time having care for it, and above all glorifying God with this procedure. This is the idea that must rule the action of Man over nature. Jesus Himself exemplifies this, valuing and dominating the natural elements in His actions (e.g., *Mark 4:35-41*). But Christ’s actions are for the benefit of all man, and we have to utilize nature under this guideline, too.

So, the use of nature is mandatory for humans, even for survivorship, and the efforts to improvement of life conditions are legitimate. In the present context, the application of this concept will be accomplished through the scientific and technological realizations that are oriented to the good of humankind. That is, under the orientation of the true ethic and moral values that concerns to human dignity and respect for nature. This is especially important in the case of scientific research and techniques that deal with biological and
genetic manipulations: Nature has, in God’s will, its own purpose, shape and destiny designed for His plans, and Man cannot irresponsibly alter this, but develop its true potential within the limits of mature consideration and moral honesty.

When the relation of Man with God does not determine the relation of Man with Nature, and between Man and himself, several kinds of problems arise. In other words, when Man moves apart from the guidance of God and the Church in the Nature subject, the natural world becomes a mere object to be handled for consumption, just as an utilitarian element. This includes also other human beings, eventually considered expendable if not productive, as elderly people, or undesirable children, thus leading to legislations that favor the abominable euthanasia and abortive practices.

The opposite extreme is the divinization of Nature, or the lowering of Man’s dignity to the level of the other creatures. These both approaches, of course, are not the right way to protect Nature, the environment or human beings, since such invasive/reductive interventions threaten the environment’s hospitable and recovery capacities, and/or the own mankind.

The environmental and human ecological problems are particularly striking in developing countries, and here in Brazil, because of its mega biodiversity, there is today a significant concern about overexploitation. However, the key point is not necessarily the lack of resources, but the wrong distribution and availability of them.

The shocking contrast is the increasing human power over the environment and the poverty that this is eventually bringing. But Man’s responsibility increases at the same powering pace, being the charge of human lordship over Nature. This responsibility is individual, institutional, governmental, and international; but in the last three circles, it cannot be ruled by any political, economical or ideological paradigms. The conciliation of development and preservation is possible if ordered by a political mentality derived from the ethical alignment mentioned above, that in turn hydrates its roots in the pure source of the Church’s biblical understanding.

Although this general current environmental crisis is truly something to worry about, there are important efforts being undertaken to
oppose it. Two approaches are needed, the practical one, with direct juridical and *in situ* preservation measures, as for example any adequate reforestation work; and the no less important service of enlightening of ideas inside various forums, from schools to governmental debates. Just to mention one obvious example of this kind of effort, it can be cited the present initiative of Creatio Conference, “Jesus and Nature: Catholic perspectives on environmental issues” for World Youth Day 2013.

Anyway, the responsibility about nature concerns all humankind. Not only because of the more immediate threats, but also because of the foundation of nature as a creation of God. And in this sense, it has to be considered the value of each unique particularity of all nature, human and other living beings, but furthermore their linking in an ordered and equilibrated system, as God desired it to function to His glory and in the benefit of Man.

So, we have to understand nature in the perspective of God’s Creation, to respect it and be thankful for it, and to see in it the hand and provision of God; it’s a wonderful and essential way to approach God, and then to reconcile with Him – in the spirit of overcoming the 4th human rupture pointed out by the Christian Life Movement.

This approach to God is a natural one, since Nature is the first revelation of God to Man (cf. Romans 1:19-20). The research and ongoing knowledge of Nature – emphasized in the knowing of the biotic, live world – inevitably leads to a dazzling feeling and consequent question for the origin and purpose of it. (Eventually, it was already expressed by distinguished men – Voltaire, Pasteur - the idea that serious scientific work points to God, and that poor science moves one apart from Him).

From now on, it is very important to consider for the next topic that, as can be understood in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (n. 454), nature was reconciled by Jesus in His passion, in His own Body, in a sense; so now there is a straight tie for the Word made flesh, Christ, and humankind, and nature.

The relationship between Biology (most represented thus far not as a discipline of its own, but rather in association with problematic scientific and environmental issues) and Faith
has, however, another perspective than the one cited above. And this one seems to me very pertinent and meaningful. It is that Biology deals with life, and Faith deals with the Church – but the Catholic Church is the Mystical Body of Christ, that is, a living organism. And this is not wordplay, but a doctrinal reality (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*; Pius XII, *Encyclical Letter Mystici Corporis Christi*). This seems to be convenient to emphasize, for its developments and understanding of the relationship between Biology and Faith, with its consequences in the current environmental problems.

Saint Bede (*Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*) points out that Christ, talking to Paul in the road to Damascus, asks him not “Why are you persecuting my members?”, but says “Why are you persecuting Me?”, because Christ suffers in His Body, that is the Church, Christ’s Body, as the same Paul will refer to, later (*1Cor*:12-27). The direct association of Christ – Church, His Mystical Body – living organism – Biology, brings a refreshed view of the environmental issues and the Faith orientations on the subject.

In fact, the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (n. 464) makes explicit the “sort of kinship of man with his creaturely environment”, as long as Man refers to God about the Nature’s subjects; then a [re]conciliation of Man and Nature is possible, generating his respect for all observed reality. That leads to the idea that the Mystical Body of Christ, as a living organism, has its particular (mainly spiritual) participation in the Biology-Faith dialogue concerning the current environmental issues.

At this point, it is important to make clear that this participation cannot be, of course, interpreted as some derivation of philosophies that propose a confusion of identities between the living things as a “whole and unique being”, but only states the reality of the spiritual life of the Mystical Body of Christ and its real protagonist action in this world, principally spiritual but effective through the members of the Body, the individual Catholic believers.

Given the premises for the understanding of what is this living organism of the Mystical Body, it is possible to attempt a deepening of its meaning, to then comment on its main implications, focusing in its relation with the environmental issues, and finally comment on topics for future considerations.
The Mystical Body as a Living Organism:

As was said before, Biology, in studying life, has to consider all its complexities, and forms of life, and connections, even under philosophical – or theological –aspects. Also, it was seen that humankind is an intermediate step between God and the other corporeal creatures, an “intermediary organism” that encloses biology and faith, so, with material reality that runs to transcendental life. Jesus is truly God and truly an human being, and reconciled the human nature in His passion, in His own Body; but the Body of Christ has other than only the material dimension, that is, has also the mystical one, which comes to be the Catholic Church. In fact, the catholic theological thought identifies the blood and water from the wounded side of the crucified Christ as the Church sacraments of Eucharist and Baptism, respectively (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church). So, this Mystical Body, the Church, is really a living organism, a whole and original, well organized life form, whose Head is Jesus Christ. It is really united as an organism with Nature. And as all the other life forms wanted by God, it has its own linking role in the ordered and equilibrated system between all organisms, positively acting to His glory and for the benefit of Man.

A very concrete aspect of this Mystical Body is that, as in any other organism, its members have to act united with, and according to, the Head: we, the individual Catholics, are these members, and we are obligated in conscience to follow God’s will to our own realization (cf. 1 Cor 12, 12-27; Eph. 5: 23; Col 1: 18). And the profound meaning of this voluntary act, as a biotic aspect of the Mystical Body, is given by Faith, as well as the ultimate meaning of Biology and of the other sciences, of the Creation and environment, and of the relations of Man with God and Nature. The same Faith evince another crucial characteristic of this Body – it has a spirit, is inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Implications:

Being Biology the study of life – life in its plenitude, so including the Mystical Body –, it has necessarily to take in consideration and deal with the different problems that affect life. The environmental issues are currently a sharp problem to life in many levels, implying then also the Mystical Body organism.

Broadly, there are two ways by which these issues are threatening life:
1. Destruction of life as such – the overexploitation of natural resources brings the alarming danger of species extinction, at an infra-human level. This has tragic consequences for the equilibrium of life in the entire planet, characterizing abuse and disrespect for God’s Creation.

2. Damage of different kinds to human life, both of body and (more seriously) of the spirit -
   a) Loss of natural resources that are essential for human feeding, and as raw material for innumerable human activities and necessities;
   b) The other living beings have to be respected as creatures of God, and not reduced to mere disposable utilitarian. This appeal to the above cited “sort of kinship of man with his creaturely environment”, highlighting the responsibility of humankind in the stewardship of Nature;
   c) In losing the landscape, beauty of Creation is also lost, and so there is an impoverishment for the more elevated aspirations of the human spirit;
   d) Environmental damage harm, directly or indirectly, other human beings; the human beings that are part of the Mystical Body are so also affected, and in this sense the Church is affected in its members – and, the Head of the Mystical Body is offended; all this is a sin, so environmental damage affects also the human soul, being a relevant point to serious thought and care.

These considerations open to the idea of Human Ecology, emphasized by the Popes since John Paul II (cf. his Encyclical Letter Centesimus Annus; and Pope Francis Catechesis, 2013-06-05). The Human Ecology can be understood as the care for the human being in relation to his dependency of the environment; or, as the relation of Man with Nature in the aspect of human survivorship and his right to a dignified life. Thus is evident the connection between Human and Environmental Ecology. Both approaches to Ecology, by their goals, underline the dignity of Science, but historical and current deviations from its relations with God led, consequently, to a bad relationship of Man with Nature. Anyway, Human Ecology is a link of the living organism of the Mystical Body to the environmental issues – a kind of (necessary)
“person to person” interaction between organisms, the Church on one side and humankind plus Nature on the other, the two branches of the same tree rooted in God.

In giving prominence to the word “Church”, the notion of God’s close presence – Jesus, the Head of the Body – in relation to current environmental issues originated by human scorn to the dignity of Nature clarifies the gravity of sins against Creation. In short, abuse of Creation is an offense to God.

Facing these problems, the question is how to react to them. The fundamental point to Catholics is act coherently with the idea of respect for Creation as the Church teaches; but two general directions were already mentioned (juridical and in situ preservation measures; engaging in the current environmental debates, at educational, political and thought levels). To this, it can be added the contribution, when possible, with funds to help the different aspects of the preservationist actions. This responsibility falls over all humankind, but of course the responsibility of biologists and researches, especially the Catholic ones, is greater: as human beings, as part of Nature, as specialists, and as Catholics, i.e., as part of the Mystical Body of Christ, by Whom and for Whom all was created. However, the Mystical Body as such has another and particular way of action, which is mainly spiritual action, because of the sin aspect of the abuse of Creation. This spiritual perspective characterizes the Mystical Body of the Church, and is a service to the environmental issues that cannot be substituted for nothing, being its reach of unimaginable value. The Church prayers, offerings and sacrifices for any subject have infinite repercussion, as they presuppose the unlimited intervention of God’s power. And the especial feature of these Church interventions in the case of the environmental issues is that the Head of this Mystical Body, Christ Himself, is directly inserted and acting, as part (in fact, the principal one) of this living and mobilized organism, which in turn is one of the very partaker beings of the problem, that is worked then “from the inside”, so to speak, and so counting with the “more direct” power of God Himself to help in the solutions.

This is, properly, the strength of the Church as the Mystical Body in the environmental issues. (And it also suggests the importance of the strength of the particular actions of each individual man as part of the Mystical Body of Christ).
In summary, it is this same organism, enriched by God in its own constitutive nature, which will act directly on the problem of the balance between life forms, by its privileged forum to be part of the same chain of life. Therefore, it becomes clear the extraordinary strength of acting of the Church in relation to environmental problems, not as directly as the representativeness of its individual members and material actions, but in its particular ambit of much greater power and spiritual range as Body of Christ.

Here there is an analogy with Salvation: Christ made Himself a man by Incarnation to elevate and save Man. In this plan of salvation, Nature and environmental issues are present in relation to human choices. And Christ put Himself closer to this subject through the Mystical Body. The parallelism of these ideas, as well as the notion of the kinship of Man and Nature, can be inferred in the thoughts of John Paul II (Encyclical Letter Dominum et Vivificatem): “The Incarnation of God the Son signifies the taking up into unity with God, not only of a human nature, but...of everything that is flesh - the whole of humanity, the entire visible and material world. The Incarnation, then, also has a cosmic significance and a cosmic dimension. The "first-born of all creation," becoming incarnate in the individual humanity of Christ, unites himself in some way with the entire reality of man, which is also "flesh" - and in this reality with all "flesh," with the whole of creation”.

If the right respect for Nature is achieved, Man can actualize the reconciliation with God and Creation as proposed by Human Ecology. Accomplish this in (and as) the Mystical Body is the perspective of the Catholics. There is the responsibility to rise all things to God, and, as the Body follows the Head, Nature subjects must be led to Him in this ecological participation of interacting lives.

**Topics for future considerations:**

There are some marginal ideas that arose with the Biology-Faith and the Mystical Body thoughts. They are mentioned here as subjects for future developments, since they can eventually offer interesting addition to the main items already addressed or to other correlated subjects.

- A curious aspect of the Biology-Faith connection in the study and comprehension of the Mystical Body is its “visible” aspect. The material evidence of the human individuals that
are part of this Body is biologically accessible; however, we see the members but not the Body. On the other hand, by Faith we can believe in what we cannot see, and this is the case of the Mystical Body as such – but even Faith cannot tell if one specific human being is really part of the Mystical Body, since only God knows the sincerity of the souls. And, the Head of the Mystical Body can be materially seen in the Eucharistic Bread, but can only really be seen as Himself in the Host by Faith. The point is, the spiritual truth of all the material Creation is always more important to life – human life above all – than any material expression of this same life. If the “microscope” of Faith doesn’t make this clear enough, as the Church teaches, the best efforts to find adequate solutions to the environmental problems will fail.

- The strength of the Church as the Mystical Body is spiritual, and the importance of the strength of the particular actions of each individual man as part of the Mystical Body rests also on the spiritual aspect. Of course, “Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone” (James 2, 17), so Catholics cannot be omission on the material measures in favor of Nature. However, it is the desire of God that each human being participates of His Church, because this spiritual proximity with Him is the guarantee of Man’s joy and salvation; it is for Man’s own benefit. This participation allows to each human being to produce the necessary good works, finding his human brethrens (by the essence of the shared human nature in Christ, which joins Man) and acting beneficially for Nature as part of these good works. In other words, even the individual power to do good things only is effective if the individual human being is united with Christ and the other men, in the Mystical Body, also in the environmental issues.

- From the Mystical Body as a living organism concept, it was seen that Nature can be correctly appreciated and preserved. But the inverse idea is also important. To care of the Nature is to take care of the Human Ecology, and so, of the human beings. And this kind of care is a benefit for the Mystical Body, to the Church. And is fundamental to
take care – and very well – of the Church, because of its own life, and because it is from Christ, in His living Body, that the right ways can be seen to the solution of the environmental/human ecology problems, as ways of salvation – in a more elevated sense, not merely material – to all humankind.

A secondary consequence of this is the valorization and support to the Catholic scientists and researchers, due to their efforts in behalf of both directions.

Both the Biology-Faith dialogue and the Mystical Body as a living organism subject are very broad themes and deserve further considerations. It is obviously impossible to explore in a single and limited paper all their theological, or others, developments. By way of conclusion, it can be simply said that the actuality of their perspective in the current debate on environmental issues is highlighted, with an approach on the position of Science and Human Ecology and the responsible actions of man, by charity, in relation to Creation, as well as the depth of God’s plan, in Whom and by Whom all things are joined harmoniously. The human beings are part of a greater organism, so taking care of life - in all its manifestations - is caring also of themselves. Man is the focus of God’s love, and so Man must use the Creation, under the guidance of God and as expressed in His Church - his Body - to reach their ultimate goal, the New Creation in its fullness. In fact, Creation was subject of praise from the Chosen People, Israel, and Salvation was understood as the New Creation (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church n. 452) – New Creation, or Paradise, that is, the intimacy with God.

It is the understanding of this degree of the human dignity that will reveal the proper dignity of the rest of Creation, and point the right way, built on its true base - the Angular Stone, Christ - to the effective measures to be taken in the environmental issues. This is the most appropriate and deep relationship possible between Biology and Faith.

**Conclusions:**
Biology and Faith act together in the current environmental issues, being particularly united in the Mystical Body of the Catholic Church, whose has the only effective guidance, under the wisdom and authority of God, on the subject;
The concept of living organism can be identified and must be valued in the Mystical Body of Christ, its Head, as a kind of “intermediate organism” in the linked and ordered system of life created by God, and with its specific mission;

This Mystical Body is the Catholic Church, and one aspect of its mission in favor of Man, as God planned from the beginning, is the pertinent involvement in the current environmental debate. The Church, as a living Mystical Body, is inserted in the questions of ecology, especially Human ecology; so, the integral “ecology” is the adequate interaction of these organisms, the human being in the Church, i.e., the Mystical Body of Christ, and the other beings of Creation;

This environmental debate is founded on the reconciliation of Nature and Man in the Body of Christ; therefore, the same Church; and this association highlights the role of the Mystical Body, as a living organism in interaction with other ones, at the spiritual (especially, but not only) level on the subject of life questions;

This association must be better recognized, understood, and applied as a specific way offered by God in His solicitude for the needs of human beings; the presence of Christ Himself as Head of the Mystical Body gives a particular power to the actions of the Body, also on environmental issues, and in a sense, specially on these;

The role and responsibility of Catholics, especially those who act in the fields of environment, are clarified and encouraged: as human beings, as part of Nature, as specialists, and as Catholics, i.e., as part of the Mystical Body of Christ: this is the perspective of the importance of their engagement in the care of Nature, considering the subject in the light of God’s (transcendental and eternal) plans;

To preserve Nature, the living organisms and the environment, as desired nowadays, it is absolutely necessary to depurate from the debate the widespread limited horizontal perspective, merely ideological and political, and situate the question in the ambit of its true value: the interaction with the Mystical Body organism of Christ and its life’s – eternal - life – perspective.