

DOI: 10.47632/2075-4817-2022-9-183-199

THE PERSPECTIVE OF SDGs AND CST ON BIODIVERSITY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE PROTECTION OF FOREST ECOSYSTEMS IN THE UKRAINIAN CARPATHIANS

This article explores the interrelations between Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), in the first instance SDG 15 “Protection of life on land”, and the perspective of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) on biodiversity protection. Being rooted in the perception of nature as “God’s handiwork”, the Catholic perspective pays attention to the relationship of humans with the natural world, using the terms like “integral ecology” or “ecological sin”. Global lines of action expressed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and related international policies do not operate with theological concepts but present substantive suggestions for protecting biodiversity. Considering both CST and SDGs, the possible local policy directions for a precise territory with rich biodiversity within the territory of Ukraine, namely the Carpathian Mountains, are outlined. These include alteration of current practices and income-generating economic activities, such as switching from logging to recreation.

Keywords: Catholic Social Teaching, Sustainable Development Goals, integral ecology, *Laudato Si'*, biodiversity, Carpathians.

Introduction

The loss of biodiversity happening at an unprecedented rate¹ has become a subject of concern in many fora, both secular and religious, including the United Nations (UN) and the Catholic Church.

Biodiversity as a notion has been coined quite recently in human history². The current formal definition of biological diversity is enshrined in the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), adopted at the famous Earth Summit

¹ *Living Planet Report 2020 – Bending the curve of biodiversity loss* / ed. R. Almond, M. Grooten, and T. Petersen. Gland 2020, p. 10. [There was an average 68% fall in the populations of mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles, and fish between 1970 and 2016.]

² *Handbuch Umweltethik* / ed. K. Ott, J. Dierks, L. Voget-Kleschin. Stuttgart 2016, p. 241.

in Rio de Janeiro³. It comprises the variability among living organisms from all sources at different levels: the diversity within species, between species, and of ecosystems⁴. It is in this meaning that the term “biodiversity” is used within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) proclaimed as the agenda for the world for 2015–2030⁵.

The Catholic Church, on the one hand, did not initially include environmental issues within the domain of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) and was even accused of contributing to the environmental crisis⁶. On the other hand, from the first centuries of Christianity it has enjoyed the rich tradition of the Church Fathers, who commented on the relationship between God, humanity, and the environment⁷, and later a clear thread of eco-spirituality arose within the Franciscan tradition⁸. When environmental concerns came to be seen as a pressing social issue in the 1970-1980s, it was quite logical that the Catholic Church began to address environmental issues within the scope of CST.

This article first explores the stance of CST on biodiversity, then it outlines the SDG approach to biodiversity protection and, finally, it attempts to apply both perspectives to the protection of the biodiversity of the Ukrainian Carpathian Mountains.

Biodiversity in CST

The environment was placed among “new social problems” within CST for the first time in *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971), the apostolic letter of Pope Paul VI⁹. Remarkably, this was not the case just four years before, as his encyclical *Populorum Progressio* teaches that the “whole of creation is for man” and is concerned in this regard rather with the fair distribution of earth’s goods among

³ History of the Convention // *Convention on Biological Diversity* (<https://www.cbd.int/history/>).

⁴ Cf. *Convention on Biological Diversity*, Rio de Janeiro, 5 June 1992 // *United Nations Treaty Series*, vol. 1760, p. 79, Article 2, available from https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=XXVII-8&chapter=27.

⁵ See General Assembly resolution 70/1, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, A/RES/70/1 (25 September 2015) (www.un.org/ga).

⁶ See John Mizzoni. Environmental Ethics: A Catholic View // *Environmental Ethics* 36 (2014) 405-419, pp. 405-407.

⁷ See O. Kindiy. Patrology, Ecology, and Eschatology: Looking Forward to the Future of the Planet by Looking Back to the Fathers of the Church // *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 55:3-4 (2014) 303-327, p. 313.

⁸ See M. Carbajo Núñez. Franciscan Spirituality and Integral Ecology: Relational Bases vs the Throwaway Culture // *Islamochristiana* 43 (2017) 59-78, pp. 66-67.

⁹ Paul VI. *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971), §21; see J. de Tavernier and K. Ndubueze. Laudato Si’s View on Integral Ecology in Light of the Planetary Boundaries Concept // *New Blackfriars* 101/1096 (2020) 740-759, pp. 745-746.

humans¹⁰. On the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of *Populorum Progressio*, St. Pope John Paul II, however, added emphasis on the responsibility while citing this encyclical¹¹. Even though not much had been said directly about biodiversity before the encyclical letter *Laudato Si'*, some broader passages on creation are highly relevant. These can be found at least in the legacy of St. John Paul II and Benedict XVI, the Compendium of the Social Teaching of the Catholic Church and the Catechism, and statements of regional conferences of bishops.

St. John Paul II, for instance, while talking of authentic human development, draws attention to the understanding of material goods as a gift from God and to the certain affinity that man has with other creatures¹². He substantiates this thought by interpreting the book of Genesis saying that the man “is placed in the garden with the duty of cultivating and watching over it” but “must remain subject to the will of God, who imposes limits upon his use and dominion over things”¹³. It follows that “development cannot consist only in the use, dominion over, and indiscriminate possession of created things”¹⁴. He invites readers to think about three considerations regarding the respect for beings: the mutual connection of beings “whether living or inanimate – animals, plants, the natural elements” in an ordered system, which excludes the possibility of their use “simply as one wishes”; realization that natural resources are limited, meaning we should care about their availability for present and future generations; and negative impacts of industrialization, such as environmental pollution, affecting human health¹⁵.

In the same vein, in his address concerning peace, St. Pope John Paul II calls for respect of delicate ecological balances, which are “upset by the uncontrolled destruction of animal and plant life or by a reckless exploitation of natural resources” and acknowledges the “integrity of creation,” which humans are called to safeguard¹⁶. In addition, he appreciates the aesthetic value of creation, as contact with nature has a deep restorative power, and as the creation is called to glorify God, to join man in praising Him¹⁷.

He also thematizes the aspect of relationship: “it is the relationship man has with God that determines his relationship with his fellows and with his environment”¹⁸.

¹⁰ See Paul VI. *Populorum Progressio* (1967), §22.

¹¹ See John Paul II. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987), §29.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., §34.

¹⁶ John Paul II. *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation: Message for the Celebration World Day of Peace, 1 January 1990*, §§7-8 (w2.vatican.va).

¹⁷ See John Paul II. *Peace with God the Creator*, §14, §16.

¹⁸ John Paul II. *Address of His Holiness Pope [...] to Conference on Environment and Health, 24 March 1997*, §4.

Such a relationship is characterized as “kinship of man with his creaturely environment”¹⁹. This has been present in Benedictine and Franciscan spirituality and is pertinent to Christian culture as such²⁰.

Some of these ideas have been included and developed in the Compendium of the Social Teaching of the Catholic Church (the Compendium). For instance, those of the “gift” and “responsibility.” Creation is considered to be a gift that entails the inherent duty of care and adherence to its God-given purpose²¹. Moreover, this duty is seen through the lens of common good as “common and universal duty”²².

Importantly, the Compendium contains direct acknowledgement of *the environmental value of biodiversity*²³, which follows from St. John Paul II’s “ordered system”²⁴. The following attitude to biodiversity is expressed: it “must be handled with a sense of responsibility and adequately protected, because it constitutes an extraordinary richness for all of humanity”²⁵. In addition, the importance of forests is underlined, as they “help maintain the essential natural balance necessary for life” and individuals and institutions “must feel the commitment to protect the heritage of forests”²⁶.

The Compendium also advocates the reconciliation of economic development and environmental protection, saying that solutions “require that economic activity respect the environment to a greater degree” and that an “economy respectful of the environment will not have the maximization of profits as its only objective”²⁷. It also clearly suggests that the creation, apart from being a resource, has a spiritual relevance for humanity, because it “reveals the mystery of God who created and sustains it”; thus humanity is called to act in relation to it with “gratitude and appreciation”²⁸.

Pope Benedict XVI continued developing the environmental theme within CST, reiterating the importance of stewardship of God’s creation to the extent that he was even called “the Green Pope”²⁹. His encyclical letter *Caritas in Veritate*, dealing

¹⁹ John Paul II. *Address to Conference on Environment and Health*, §4.

²⁰ See *ibid.*

²¹ See Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (2004), §451, §460 §473.

²² *Ibid.*, §466.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ John Paul II. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, §34.

²⁵ *Compendium of the Social Doctrine*, §466.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, §470.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, §487.

²⁹ See M. Rezac. Benedict XVI: The Green Pope // *The Catholic Register* (www.catholicregister.org), May 7, 2017.

with integral or authentic human development, explains how Love and Truth show us the road to true development³⁰. In a relevant section about the environment, the Pope repeats the perception of the environment as “God’s gift to everyone” and the “wonderful result of God’s creative activity” that we are to use responsibly³¹. This responsibility exists vis-à-vis the poor, future generations, and humanity, requiring at the same time respect towards the “intrinsic balance of creation”³². He clearly warns not to view nature as something more important than the human person but also not to treat it simply as “raw material manipulated at our pleasure”³³. At the same time, he calls us to be conscious of nature’s “grammar” and view nature as something greater than a resource, because it speaks of the Creator and His love for humanity³⁴.

Pope Francis in *Laudato Si’* from the beginning of the encyclical places the loss of biodiversity among the troubling issues that our common home is facing³⁵. He develops CST by saying that not only are non-human creatures more than a resource, but they also have value in themselves³⁶, and he finds a basis for the call to recognize such a value in a biblical perspective³⁷. He also cites the German bishops talking of the “priority of *being* over that of *being useful*” of non-human creatures³⁸. Importantly, unique human dignity does not mean that creatures are subordinated completely to the good of people. Thus the Pope cites the Catechism to exemplify that a distorted anthropocentrism is criticized, as “[e]ach creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection [...], reflects in its own way a ray of God’s infinite wisdom and goodness” and “man must respect the particular goodness of every creature”³⁹. In further passages we read that the creation of each human being in the image of God should not make us overlook each creature’s own purpose⁴⁰. At the same time, “biocentrism” is not welcome, as it hinders an understanding of the unique responsibility and unique capacities of knowledge, will, and freedom that human beings have⁴¹.

³⁰ See Benedict XVI. *Caritas in Veritate* (2009), §52.

³¹ *Ibid.*, §48.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ See Francis. *Laudato Si’* (2015) §§32-42.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, §33.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, §69.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Vatican City 1997, §339.

⁴⁰ See Francis. *Laudato Si’*, §84.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, §118.

Pope Francis also elaborates on the topics of “God’s gift” and “God’s love,” speaking of “God’s loving plan in which every creature has its own value and significance” and the fact that “creation can only be understood as a gift from the outstretched hand of the Father of all, and as a reality illuminated by love”⁴². He further says that “God’s love is the fundamental moving force in all created things”⁴³ and the entire material universe speaks of it⁴⁴. Citing the Canadian and Japanese bishops, the Pope explains metaphorically that creatures are letters of a precious book written by God. Therefore, the “contemplation of creation allows us to discover in each thing a teaching which God wishes to hand on to us”⁴⁵.

Talking of integral ecology in a practical dimension, Pope Francis emphasizes the need to study ecosystems “not only to determine how best to use them, but also because they have an intrinsic value independent of their usefulness”⁴⁶. In this context, to use the creation sustainably we need to pay attention to “each ecosystem’s regenerative ability”⁴⁷. He also supports the specialists’ view on greater protection of areas with particularly rich biodiversity⁴⁸.

In the context of politics and the economy, the Pope criticizes treatment of biodiversity as resources to be exploited without consideration of the “real value of things”⁴⁹. In addition, he criticizes the maximization of profits, blind to ecological consequences, including “harm done to biodiversity”⁵⁰.

In his assessment of humanity’s progress in an environmental sphere, Pope Francis praises the 1992 Earth Summit for being a real step forward, “prophetic for its time,” but points out the lack of the implementation of its ideas⁵¹. This particularly concerns biodiversity, as progress in this sphere was not as significant as desired⁵².

The recent “natural outcome of the idea of integral ecology”⁵³ comprises the suggestion to add “ecological sin” to the Catechism, defined as “an action or omission against God, against one’s neighbour, the community and

⁴² Ibid., §76.

⁴³ Ibid., §77.

⁴⁴ Ibid., §84.

⁴⁵ Ibid., §85.

⁴⁶ Ibid., §140.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., §37.

⁴⁹ Ibid., §190.

⁵⁰ Ibid., §195.

⁵¹ Ibid., §167.

⁵² Ibid., §§168-169.

⁵³ See N. Mayrand. Theologians Praise Suggestion to Add ‘Ecological Sins’ to Catholic Catechism // *Crux* (cruxnow.com), November 20, 2019.

the environment”⁵⁴. Such discussions continue to assign more value to the duty of care for creation (and biodiversity) within the Catholic Church.

Biodiversity in the SDGs

Some of the foundations of biodiversity protection (albeit with different wording) and sustainable development were laid already during the 1972 Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm. Principles 2, 3, and 4 of the Stockholm declaration are the most illustrative in this regard. Principle 4 says, for example: “[m]an has a special responsibility to safeguard and wisely manage the heritage of wildlife and its habitat [...]. Nature conservation, including wildlife, must therefore receive importance in planning for economic development”⁵⁵. Another fundamental source is the “Brundtland Report.” Its perception of “sustainable development” was relevant for the 1992 Rio Conference, and little has changed to the present time. There *sustainable development* is understood as one that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”⁵⁶. With respect to biodiversity, it recognizes various dimensions of its importance:

The diversity of species is necessary for the normal functioning of ecosystems and the biosphere as a whole. The genetic material in wild species contributes billions of dollars yearly to the world economy in the form of improved crop species, new drugs and medicines, and raw materials for industry. But utility aside, there are also moral, ethical, cultural, aesthetic, and purely scientific reasons for conserving wild beings⁵⁷.

Both concepts solidified during the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro. The Rio declaration extensively operates with the term “sustainable development,” tying it to environmental protection (Principle 4) and talking about interdependency and the indivisibility of peace, development, and environmental protection (Principle 25)⁵⁸. Furthermore, “Conservation of biological diversity” became a separate program area of Rio’s “Agenda 21”⁵⁹. Its

⁵⁴ Synod of Bishops. *The Amazon: New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology*: Final document (secretariat.synod.va), October 26, 2019, §82.

⁵⁵ United Nations Environment Programme. *Stockholm Declaration: Declaration on the Human Environment* (1972) (wedocs.unep.org).

⁵⁶ World Commission on Environment and Development. *Our common future* (1987), §27 (sustainabledevelopment.un.org).

⁵⁷ WCED. *Our common future*, §53.

⁵⁸ See United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development*, A/CONF.151/26 Vol. I (1992) (www.un.org).

⁵⁹ See United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. *Agenda 21* (1992), Chapter 15 (sustainabledevelopment.un.org).

Chapter 15 is consonant with the CBD and aims to support the then newly-created convention⁶⁰.

The CBD itself was called “the most comprehensive convention on nature conservation and development policy in the world”⁶¹. It acknowledges the “intrinsic value of biological diversity and of the ecological, genetic, social, economic, scientific, educational, cultural, recreational and aesthetic values of biological diversity and its components”⁶². Thus it recognizes the importance of both intrinsic value and other values of biodiversity for humans; however, it remains silent on the definition of the term “intrinsic value” as such.

The CBD’s objectives include: the conservation of biological diversity; the sustainable use of its components; and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources⁶³. Here “sustainable use” means: “the use of components of biological diversity in a way and at a rate that does not lead to the long-term decline of biological diversity, thereby maintaining its potential to meet the needs and aspirations of present and future generations”⁶⁴. The CBD contains a number of obligations of its member states, including those on development of national strategies, plans and programs on biodiversity and their integration into cross-sectoral policies; on identification and monitoring of important components of biodiversity; or those on *in-situ* and *ex-situ* conservation.

Afterwards, biodiversity has always been an inevitable component of the sustainability discourse, including in the 200 Millennium Development Goals, the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, discussions of the Commission on Sustainable Development on several occasions and at the conference Rio+20⁶⁵. Thus, “biodiversity” naturally made its way to the SDGs in 2015.

SDG 15, “Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss,” is directly relevant for the protection of biodiversity on land. It includes 9 substantive targets, encompassing conservation, restoration, sustainable use and management of ecosystems and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains and drylands, reduction of extinction and natural habitats’ degradation, ending poaching and trafficking of protected species, introducing measures against impacts of invasive alien species,

⁶⁰ Cf. UNCED. *Agenda 21*, §15.1.

⁶¹ *Handbuch Umweltethik*, p. 244.

⁶² *Convention on Biological Diversity*, Preamble.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, Article 1.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, Article 2.

⁶⁵ See Biodiversity and ecosystems // *SDG Knowledge Platform* (sustainabledevelopment.un.org).

and the integration of ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning. SDG 15 is closely interconnected with other SDGs, especially goals 1 (no poverty), 2 (no hunger), 3 (good health), 5 (gender equality), 8 (good jobs and economic growth), 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure), 10 (reduced inequalities), 13 (climate action), 14 (life below water), and 16 (peace and justice)⁶⁶.

Progress in the implementation of SDG 15 is only partly successful. Some of the targets of Goal 15 were to be achieved by 2020, including targets 15.1, 15.2, 15.5, 15.8, and 15.9⁶⁷. However, the 2021 Sustainable Development Goals Report attests that “The world has fallen short on its 2020 targets to halt biodiversity loss”⁶⁸. For instance, even though key biodiversity areas witnessed an increase of approximately 13-14 percentage points since 2000, not much change has been seen in the last five years⁶⁹. Forests have experienced notable progress towards their sustainable management from 2000-2010 to 2010-2020, yet the loss of forests “remains alarming”⁷⁰. There is also progress in enacting legislation to tackle the problem of invasive alien species, though in practice this area remains under-financed⁷¹. In addition, earlier it was reported that the increase of protected areas is not representative, as the indicator of their effective management is lacking.⁷² Moreover, there is a need for better integration of Goal 15 across other goals and of a new narrative able to explain better why Goal 15 is “essential for goals related to climate change, water, food security, gender equality and leaving no one behind, and to secure the wholehearted engagement of all relevant actors”⁷³.

The SDGs, being adopted as the UN General Assembly resolution, have only a non-binding legal nature but refer to international obligations under other instruments⁷⁴. The CBD, creating obligations for 196 states⁷⁵, belongs to such agreements; therefore, the state of its implementation is also illustrative for the performance of Goal 15. Global Biodiversity Outlook 5, assessing the implementation of Aichi Biodiversity Targets 2010-2020, adopted by parties to CBD, unfortunately concludes that none of the 20 targets have been fully achieved at

⁶⁶ See J. Sachs. How SDG 15 Links With Other SDGs // *SDG Academy* (sdgacademylibrary.mediaspace.kaltura.com), August 6, 2019.

⁶⁷ GA. *Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 24-25.

⁶⁸ United Nations. *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2021*, p. 56 (unstats.un.org).

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 57.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² See UN-DESA Division for Sustainable Development Goals. *Sustainable Development Goal 15: Progress and Prospects*, New York, 14-15 May 2018, p. 3 (sustainabledevelopment.un.org).

⁷³ Ibid., pp. 1, 6.

⁷⁴ See GA. *Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 24 [Goal 15.1].

⁷⁵ Status: Convention on Biological Diversity // *United Nations Treaty Collection*.

the global level⁷⁶. The new world agenda on biodiversity of the same level of detail as Aichi Targets is currently missing, as the Post-2020 global biodiversity framework is still being discussed⁷⁷.

Relevance of CST and SDGs for protecting biodiversity in the Ukrainian Carpathians

The approaches used by CST and the SDGs obviously have both differences and similarities.

Not repeating all the arguments made by Hickel⁷⁸ and Sachs⁷⁹ about the differences between the encyclical letter *Laudato Si'* and the SDGs, let us still pay attention to some important patterns before focusing on their similarities and possible lines of action to protect the biodiversity of forest ecosystems in the Ukrainian Carpathians.

Hickel argues, for instance, that the encyclical is visionary and bold, whereas the SDGs apply a “business-as-usual mentality”⁸⁰. Sachs similarly observes that the SDGs try to preserve the logic of industrial growth, while the encyclical is of the view that planetary boundaries have already been pushed to their limits without solving the issue of poverty⁸¹. The encyclical concentrates rather on healing than on management⁸² and, importantly, pays attention to the causes of the present crisis, such as the power interests of economic and finance systems, which the UN documents fail to acknowledge⁸³. Another aspect of difference is the focus on the use of resources present in the logic of SDGs, as opposed to non-utilitarian logic, the existential value of creatures, present in *Laudato Si'*⁸⁴.

It can also be noted that the SDGs and CST are written in completely different genres. While SDGs are coined in pragmatic technical language, CST often uses metaphoric language and calls to look at social realities from a transcendent perspective. Secular SDGs, of course, do not operate with the categories of “God’s

⁷⁶ See Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity. *Global Biodiversity Outlook 5 – Summary for Policy Makers*. Montréal 2020, p. 4.

⁷⁷ See Geneva Biodiversity Conference Inches Towards Post-2020 Global Framework // IISD (sdg.iisd.org), May 4, 2022.

⁷⁸ See J. Hickel. The pope v the UN: who will save the world first? // *The Guardian* (www.theguardian.com), June 23, 2015.

⁷⁹ See W. Sachs. Papst vs. UNO: Sustainable Development Goals und Laudato Si'; Abgesang auf das Entwicklungszeitalter? // *PERIPHERIE – Politik, Ökonomie, Kultur* 38:2 (2018) 245-260.

⁸⁰ See Hickel. The Pope v the UN.

⁸¹ See Sachs. Papst vs. UNO, p. 255.

⁸² See *ibid.*, p. 254.

⁸³ See *ibid.*, pp. 256-257.

⁸⁴ See *ibid.*, p. 257.

love” or “God’s gift” and generally say little about the basis of human responsibility for other creatures, whereas CST describes the ethical root causes of the current environmental and social crisis. In this regard, CST has a significant advantage in being able to make its way not only to the text of policies, but to human hearts, calling for a profound change of lifestyles⁸⁵.

What unites both SDGs and CST is a call for a strong political framework for enabling global justice in a world marked by multi-layered changes⁸⁶. Both realize interconnectedness and interdependence among the economic, social, and environmental spheres. They can, in fact, complement one another in a fruitful way⁸⁷ or even “deeply enrich one another”⁸⁸. In particular, *Laudato Si’* features “ethical afflatus and the breakthrough vision,” while the SDGs have more political power to trace their enforcement⁸⁹.

When it comes to the Ukrainian Carpathians, this area rich in biodiversity, including endemic and endangered species and combining forest and mountainous ecosystems, seems to deserve special attention from the perspective of both CST and SDGs. The biodiversity of the Carpathians, for instance, includes populations of large mammals, such as brown bear, lynx, and wolf⁹⁰. Furthermore, the Carpathians are renowned for hosting one of the largest areas of ancient and primeval forests belonging to UNESCO heritage⁹¹. The forest ecosystems of the Carpathians also provide numerous ecosystem services to people, including regulation of water balance in the region and water purification, protection of the ground from erosion, carbon capturing and oxygen production, and reduction of noise pollution or climate amortization, to name a few⁹².

The biodiversity of the Carpathians is quite well protected conceptually by international legal instruments, such as the CBD, Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, the Council of Europe’s Emerald

⁸⁵ Cf. *Laudato Si’*, §§ 205-206, 218, 226.

⁸⁶ See M. Vogt. *Christliche Umweltethik: Grundlagen und zentrale Herausforderungen*. Freiburg 2021, p. 517.

⁸⁷ Vogt. *Christliche Umweltethik*, p. 516.

⁸⁸ A. Jaret and F. Pasquale. The Ethical, Legal, and Political Significance of *Laudato Si’* // *Care for the World: Laudato Si’ and Catholic Social Thought in an Era of Climate Crisis* / ed. F. Pasquale. Cambridge 2019, p. 10.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ See F. Deodatus et al. Creation of Ecological Corridors in the Ukrainian Carpathians // *The Carpathians: Integrating Nature and Society Towards Sustainability* / ed. J. Kozak et al. Berlin 2013, p. 702.

⁹¹ See Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe // UNESCO (whc.unesco.org).

⁹² See *Карпатський регіон: актуальні проблеми та перспективи розвитку: монографія у 8 т., vol. 1: Екологічна безпека та природно-ресурсний потенціал* / Інститут регіональних досліджень НАН України; ed. В. Кравців. Львів 2013, pp. 64–65.

Network of Areas of Special Conservation Interest (some parts of the Carpathians), or the regional Carpathian Convention. The problem with the effectiveness of international instruments, however, lies in the need for their implementation on the national level, including enactment of national legislation, strategies, or plans.

Despite natural richness and ecological and social importance, as well as Ukraine's international obligations to protect biodiversity in the Carpathians, some developments that negatively affect biodiversity are evident in recent years. These include ecosystem fragmentation through privatization of land, development of road infrastructure and urbanization, and unsustainable development of tourism⁹³ or illegal logging associated with corruption⁹⁴.

The Carpathians constitute one of the frontlines of the fight between profit maximization and nature protection in Ukraine. The aim of profit-making (whether legal or illegal) often outweighs all other considerations of forest management to the detriment of biodiversity⁹⁵. There are also infamous cases of developmental plans at the mountain ranges Borzhava and Svydovets. The "Polonina Borzhava" case concerns the plans of a foreign investor to construct a wind energy facility on one of the Carpathian ridges rich in flora and fauna, where a poorly performed environmental impact assessment served as the basis to justify this project⁹⁶. Another case concerns plans to build a ski resort on the Svydovets range, "one of Europe's most pristine forest landscapes and a biodiversity hotspot in the Carpathian Mountains"⁹⁷.

These cases illustrate some general trends, such as a lack of management plans or biodiversity monitoring programs even in the most biodiversity-rich areas⁹⁸ or underestimation of ecosystem services that the area is already providing⁹⁹. Moreover, certain "developmental suggestions" advancing the commercial interests of narrow oligarchical circles put at risk both local ecosystems and the livelihoods of local populations¹⁰⁰.

⁹³ See Deodatus. Creation of Ecological Corridors in the Ukrainian Carpathians, p. 702.

⁹⁴ See Earthsight. *Complicit in Corruption: How Dillion-dollar Firms and EU Governments are Failing Ukraine's Forests*. 2018, p. 5 (fe8a03e2-1131-44e7-a06a-fb468c2a30d4.filesusr.com/ugd/624187_673e3aa69ed84129bdfef91b6aa9ec17.pdf).

⁹⁵ See K. Norenko, P. Testov, and O. Vasyliuk. *Forest Territories for Wild Nature: New Policy of Forest Management*. Kyiv 2018, p. 6.

⁹⁶ See L. Jones-Walters and B. Fleming. *Report of the Online Advisory Mission: Complaint on Stand-by No. 2018/01, T-PVS/Files(2021)77*. Strasbourg 2021 (rm.coe.int/0900001680a460ce).

⁹⁷ The Svydovets Case: How Oligarchs are Planning to Destroy One of Ukraine's Most Pristine Natural Landscapes // *Bruno Manser Fonds*. Basel 2019, p. 4.

⁹⁸ See Jones-Walters and Fleming. *Report of the Online Advisory Mission*, p. 6.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁰⁰ See The Svydovets Case, p. 20.

Action to halt these negative trends and save biodiversity in the Carpathians, in line with both SDGs and CST, may consist in the following directions:

- Sustainable forest management that ensures profit to local communities and is favourable to biodiversity, treating it not only as a resource, but caring about the ecosystem, so that it avoids planting monocultural forests or clear-cutting at big areas¹⁰¹ and comprises the reintroduction of native tree species or use of soft methods of felling – the opposite of heavy equipment destroying vegetation and soils¹⁰²;
- Monitoring the populations of species, in the first place of endangered and rare species including large carnivores, and designation of their habitats and creation of action plans to save them¹⁰³;
- Identification and special protection of primeval, old-growth, and natural forests¹⁰⁴;
- Creation of ecological corridors uniting fragmented protected areas¹⁰⁵ and enhancing the connectivity of ecosystems¹⁰⁶;
- Creation of a strategy for low-impact tourism, developed in cooperation with the local population¹⁰⁷;
- Enhancement of national legislation on biodiversity protection, such as the creation of a comprehensive national strategy and action plans for the management of certain species¹⁰⁸;
- Introduction of measures to stop the dissemination of invasive alien species¹⁰⁹.

Conclusion

Both Catholic Social Teaching and Sustainable Development Goals agree on protecting biodiversity for numerous utilitarian and non-utilitarian reasons. Both perspectives recognize the interdependence of biodiversity protection and other environmental, social, and economic goals. Both acknowledge that not enough effort has been put so far to halt effectively the loss of biodiversity.

In CST, we see the love of God the Creator for all His creatures as a driving force. The human being is endowed with the gift of creation and an embedded

¹⁰¹ See Стале лісове господарство // WWF-Україна (wwf.ua); Norenko. *Forest Territories for Wild Nature*, p. 16.

¹⁰² See The Svydovets Case, p. 44.

¹⁰³ See Збереження великих хижаків // WWF-Україна (wwf.ua).

¹⁰⁴ See Збереження цінних лісів // WWF-Україна (wwf.ua).

¹⁰⁵ See The Svydovets Case, p. 43.

¹⁰⁶ See Екокоридори // WWF-Україна (wwf.ua).

¹⁰⁷ See The Svydovets Case, pp. 43-44.

¹⁰⁸ See Природоохоронне законодавство // WWF-Україна (wwf.ua).

¹⁰⁹ See Norenko. *Forest Territories for Wild Nature*, p. 6.

responsibility to care for it. It is perfectly right to use natural resources to fulfil human needs for food, housing, or medicine, as long as such use remains respectful of the order and grammar of creation and its internal balances. Quite recently, CST has directly recognized the intrinsic value of non-human creatures, as they glorify God by their mere existence. The understanding of creation as something more than a material resource means, for instance, its relevance for spiritual reflection on God's message to us contained in His magnificent works. We also find in CST the idea of relationships between God, humankind, and the environment as a crucial factor in understanding the present environmental and social crisis.

The SDGs are silent on ethical justifications but are wide-ranging in the suggested scope of action. They are highly authoritative on the international level but do not have a normative value by themselves. Despite their importance and the high level of detail, we see only partial success in their implementation. This is particularly true for Goal 15, concerning the protection of life on land, as none of its targets have been fully realized so far. With its ethical underpinning, motivating a change of lifestyle, the CST approach may potentially contribute to the better realization of the SDGs.

The Carpathian Mountains, being an affluent area in terms of biodiversity, are facing numerous dangers caused by anthropogenic factors. Suggestions to protect its biodiversity in line with CST and the SDGs include the introduction of better forest management practices, monitoring species' populations, identification and special protection of particularly valuable areas, improvement of the ecosystem's connectivity, development of low-impact tourism for the benefit of the local population, enhancement of national legislation, and other measures. Such a list is inexhaustible and could be explored further in greater detail, for instance, in the context of economic practices dominating certain areas within the Ukrainian Carpathians.

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ПОГЛЯД ЦІЛЕЙ СТАЛОГО РОЗВИТКУ ТА СОЦІАЛЬНОГО ВЧЕННЯ КАТОЛИЦЬКОЇ ЦЕРКВИ НА БІОРІЗНОМАНІТТЯ В КОНТЕКСТІ ЗАХИСТУ ЛІСОВИХ ЕКОСИСТЕМ УКРАЇНСЬКИХ КАРПАТ

Стаття присвячена взаємозв'язку між цілями сталого розвитку, найперше Ціллю 15 «Захист екосистем суші», і підходом соціального вчення Католицької Церкви щодо захисту біорізноманіття. Будучи закоріненим у сприйнятті природи як «Божого творіння», католицький погляд приділяє увагу взаємозв'язку людей і природного світу, використовуючи такі поняття, як «інтегральна екологія» чи «екологічний гріх». Глобальні пропозиції, виражені у «Порядку денному у сфері сталого розвитку до 2030 року» та пов'язаних політиках, не оперують богословськими концепціями, але містять предметні пропозиції щодо захисту біорізноманіття. Беручи до уваги як соціальне вчення Католицької Церкви, так і цілі сталого розвитку, окреслено можливі напрями місцевої політики для конкретної території в межах України, багатой на біорізноманіття, – Карпатських гір. Пропозиції включають зміну чинних практик і прибуткових видів економічної діяльності, як-от перехід від лісозаготівлі до рекреації.

Ключові слова: соціальне вчення, цілі сталого розвитку, інтегральна екологія, Laudato Si', біорізноманіття, Карпати.