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Ecological awareness: sign of the times?

Conciencia ecológica: ¿Un signo de los tiempos?

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ABSTRACT

Ecological awareness has been one of the most relevant issues today and can be interpreted as a "sign of the times," challenging humanity to rethink its relationship with nature. The Church attempts to respond to the reality of the ecological crisis from the perspective of creation theology. Recovering creation theology allows us to rediscover a sense of responsibility and fraternity with all the creation. Theology does not consider the world as a storehouse of resources, but as a gift from God that has its own value because it allows us to contemplate the mysteries of the history of salvation. This perspective invites us to recognize that human beings have been called not to dominate destructively, but to care for creation. This article tries to give a theological approach to the question of whether ecological concern can be considered a "sign of the times".

Keywords: Ecological concern, sign of the times, creation theology, salvation.

RESUMEN

La preocupación ecológica ha sido uno de los temas relevantes actualmente y puede interpretarse como un "signo de los tiempos", que interpela a la humanidad a replantear su relación con la naturaleza. La iglesia intenta dar una respuesta acerca de la realidad de la crisis ecológica, desde la teología de la creación. Recuperar la teología de la creación permite redescubrir el sentido de responsabilidad y de fraternidad con todo lo creado. La teología, no considera al mundo como un almacenamiento de recursos, sino un don que procede de Dios y que posee un valor propio porque de él se puede contemplar los misterios de la historia de la salvación. Esta perspectiva invita a reconocer que el ser humano, ha sido llamado no a dominar de manera destructiva, sino a custodiar la creación. El artículo tiene como motivo, intentar dar la aproximación teológica de si la preocupación ecológica puede considerarse como signo de los tiempos.

Palabras clave: Preocupación ecológica, signo de los tiempos, creación, salvación.

INTRODDUCTION

Recently, we have experienced a massive call to be aware and take measures regarding the impact of the climate change and environmental degradation[1]. These impacts are undeniable realities taking into consideration that their effects are in our daily life: changes in the patterns of seasons, global warming and all aspects associated with environmental degradation such as extraordinary floods as well as droughts[2]. The Church tries to take measures to solve the problem.

Therefore, observing the necessity of the Christian to respond to the signs of the times, they can draw the attention on the long ecclesial traditional teachings that insist on stewardship, the call to discernment and the care for the creation. Faithful's discernment should coincide with the truth that the creation is God´s gift. Moreover, Christians can observe the growing ecological concern as a reminder of humanity´s responsibility to protect the earth rather that exploiting it irresponsibly.

There must be a change of attitude that would search for the factors that have led to these climatic changes, and foster the real ethical values that respect creation; by treating it holistically[3]. The causes of the environmental degradation have been considered as follows: deforestation, uncontrolled population growth, poor sewage system, and destruction of the ozone layer due to polluted air released into the atmosphere[4]. Unfortunately, the aforementioned causes are drawn from physical aspects observable, but we do not see them also as an internal ethical problem that

1 Cfr. Woodeene Koeni-Bricker, *Ten Commandments for the environment, Pope Benedict XVI speaks out for creation and justice* (Ave Maria Books, 2009), 1-10; Cfr. Jacquelyn Lindsey, *The environment* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2012), 7; Cfr. Jaime Tatay, *Ecología integral, la recepción catolica del reto de la sostenibilidad* (BAC 2018), xxiii-xxiv; Cfr. Jorge Riechmann, Luis González Reyes, Yayo Herrero and Carmen Madorrán, *Qué hacemos hoy cuando nos encontramos frente a la amenaza de una crisis mayor que la económica: la ecológica* (Akal, 2012), 7-19; Cfr. Denis Edwards, *Ecology at the heart of faith, the change of heart that leads to a new way of living on the earth* (Orbis Books, 2006), 1-4.

2 Andrea Toreti, Davide Bavera, Juan Acosta Navarro, Paulo Barbosa and Alfred De Jager, *Drought in Europe June 2025* - GDO Analytical Report, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2025, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/1544910, JRC142857. In this report, the institution indicates the evolution of the drought showing the difference from some few years back. The report shows the drought that affect larger parts of central and northern Europe, as well as northern Africa, the eastern Mediterranean, and the Middle East. As far as the flood is concerned, we have statistics that show the existence of extraordinary rain that caused devastated heavy floods in Central Europe, precisely in September 2024, where; Storm Boris brought heavy rainfall across Poland, the Czech Republic, Austria, and Romania, leading to flash floods and overflowing rivers. (https://www.ecmwf.int/en/about/media-centre/focus/2024/storm-boris-and-european-flooding-september-2024). Spain was hit by Storm DANA in October 2024, particular in the region of Valencia, causing in over 200 deaths, displaced thousands, and caused widespread power and transport outages. (https://wmo.int/media/news/devastating-rainfall-hits-spain-yet-another-flood-related-disaster). Consulted on: 17/11/2025.

3 Cfr. Marybeth Lorbiecki, *Following St. Francis: John Paul II's call for ecological action* (Rizzoli ex libris, 2014), 41-47; Cfr. John Paul II, *Message for the 23rd World day of tourism* (June 24, 2002).

4 Cfr. Riechmann, Reyes, Herrero y Madorrán, *Qué hacemos hoy*, 8-9.

have their origin in human beings who have lost the responsibility to care the creation as gift from God[5].

In this paper, I will delimit the concept of ecological crisis, and then attempt to underscore the cause of the ecological crisis from a perspective of moral deterioration; the search for the need of facing this crisis from theological point of view and see this as one of the "sign of the times" that need special treatment if we really want the future generations to have also a better place to live. Consequently, I will attempt to examine the concept "sign of the times" and see whether or not the ecological awareness fits in it.

1. DELIMITATION OF THE CONCEPT OF ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

The main cause of the ecological crisis has been attributed to industrialization. It is claimed that global warming, loss of biodiversity and the rise of sea level are mainly due to industrialization. All these seem to be outcomes that express the reality of the human beings' direct non-ethical action towards the nature[6].

I refer to this ecological crisis as "sign of the times" because it needs serious discernment and concrete answer because it touches the whole existence of human beings from all dimensions whether physical or spiritual. It invites all of us to respond using the adequate tools, be it from 'the internal level or the external level'[7].

The ecological crisis does not touch only the phenomenal aspects mentioned, it touches also the inner nature of man's relationship with God, and ultimately how this person is related to the environment and vice versa. Creation does not belong to a person, rather to God who has given to human beings as a gift. This relationship has been referred to by what the Magisterium names as "Human ecology"[8].

5 Pope John Paul II declared that ecological crisis is much related to moral issues. This affirmation has been circulating from him to the present time according to the teachings of the Church. That is why, according to the popes (John Paul II and Benedict XVI), the best solution should be reviewed from the change of attitude of the people revising its relationship between a human being and the environment.

6 Cfr. Jürgen Moltmann, *Dios en la creación* (Sígueme, 1987), 35-42. Pope John Paul II had expressed that; the ecological crisis is a moral problem. He intended to indicate that, it is difficult to distinguish between the ecological crisis and moral deterioration of the society by which its consequence is noted in the environment. Cfr. John Paul II, *Peace with God the creator, peace with all the creation*, 1 January 1990. 6-7.

7 The internal level may be referred to change of attitude of a human being. This consists of ethical and moral form of life, such as reducing consumerism and adapts the austerity. From the external level, we may refer to the political policy that intensifies a call to self-responsibility to the environment and also minimizing excess expenditure of the resources of the Earth.

8 Initially, the terminology was used by Pope John Paul II in his encyclical letter *Centessimus annus*, nº 38. The Pope wanted to indicate that not only do we have to stick on the care of the environment, but the most

1.1. Ecological crisis: environmental and social problem

Studies have demonstrated that environmental problems and social problems are closely related. Man is a social being, man is a social animal[9]. Being a social animal implies that he or she cannot live alone. He needs the others and vice versa. Among the so-called "other" we include the nature to which a human being is nothing without it at least, when we talk from the level of physical life[10].

However, not only the relation between one man and the other seems to be unique, but also man needs an environment in which he can express the sense of belonging and let him think spiritually the implication of the beauty of God. Where there is no good relationship between people, the environment suffers serious deterioration. For example, in cases of wars and other conflicts, environment is affected, and consequently men are affected in all dimensions especially psychologically and economically. Due to a severe consumerism, nature suffers because it may be over exploited to suffice the consumers' demand.

1.2. Ecological crisis is related to crisis in human values

Human beings have been experiencing changes always. These evolutions are catalysts of different forms of attitudes that may provoke changes in human values. Without generalizing, we can say that there is a link between the advanced human thinking and his relation to nature[11]. In the developed societies with relativistic mentality, ethical values seem to be something outdated due to the advanced scientific methods that answer many questions which in the beginning, were thought to have no answers[12].

important thing is to take care of a human being who is an image of God. To God, a human being is a great gift which needs a maximum respect due to its dignity comparing with other creatures. He puts it clear that, just as we are concerned with the caring of the habitat of others species, we must guarantee the habitat of people, which is the family.

9 Cfr. Aristotle, *Politics*, I. 2. 1253a.

10 The Church contemplates that, nature is the divine creation, and a human being is called to be a guardian of it and not an absolute owner. Therefore, nature is a gift of God given to Man so that he can use and be sustained by it. Here comes a reason to care it since he depends on it for his sustainment. Apart from that, as Pope Francis says in *Laudato si'*; "The human person grows more, matures more and is sanctified more to the extent that he or she enters into relationships, (…) to live in communion with God, with others and with all creatures" LS 240. This implies that there is an inseparable bond between a human being and the nature, since the nature proclaims also the glory of God.

11 Cfr. Francis Bacon, *The great instauration*, in *The works of Francis Bacon*, vol. 1, ed. Ellis Spedding (Hurd and Houghton, 1878), 39. Cfr. Reynaldo D. Raluto, *Poverty and ecology at the crossroad, towards an ecological Theology of liberation in the Philippine Context* (Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2015), 42-43.

12 Cfr. Fritjof Capra, *The turning point: Science, Society, and the rising culture*, (Simon & Schuster, 1982), 61.

Nowadays everything is submitted to technocratic paradigm and scientific mode of thinking[13]. The Church insists that not all that can be submitted to technical method is ethical. Certainly, science and technology helps us to discover many things that were unknown, but that is not a guarantee to declare it the only way of getting the solution, of all questions that create anxiety in the human mind.

Man is no longer a co-creator; he has become the owner of nature. This is due to the empowering of this human being as the only being that has the right to enjoy the fruits of the nature[14]. This attitude facilitates the spirit of undervaluing the nature as an object of experiment and the source of raw materials[15].

Human beings think only about exploiting nature to achieve economic growth without considering its consequences. In fact, man becomes an enemy of nature itself. Discerned from the other point of creation itself it seems as if nature is an enemy of man who exercises his power to dominate and discover its secrets[16]. Man is always full of ambition of becoming a hero and conqueror before nature. Consumerism is one of the aspects that directly affect the environment due to its anti-austerity character. There has been a massive offer of products that seduce people to develop addiction on them[17]. This provokes an uncontrolled consumerism without thinking that the raw materials of the planets are limited. All these are due to man's thirst for power over the nature.

Economic wars among developed countries are associated with the idea that having a strong army and sophisticated weapons is the sign of power and dominion[18]. Poor countries are struggling to possess strong armies and military equipment instead of utilizing the resources to improve the living standard of their people. All these have direct and indirect consequences to the environment (man and creation)[19].

13 Cfr. Pope Francis, *Laudato si´*, nº 101.

14 Cfr. Pope Francis, *Laudato si´*, nº 115.

15 Ibidem, nº 115.

16 Cfr. Bacon, *The great instauration*, 39; Cfr. Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker, *A World View of Physics* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952); Ulrich Duchrow and Gerhard Liedke, *Shalom, Biblical perspectives on Creation, Justice and Peace* (World Council of Churches, 1987), 66.

17 The known offer of *Black Friday* has been a common phenomenon which provokes a massive consumerism. Sometimes, people buy not for necessity; rather by the impulse caused by discounts which are seen in the shops or supermarket. "Black Friday may face increasing criticism as it relates to consumer concerns about overconsumption, while also exposing environmental pressures". Yihe Huang "A review on the cause of black Friday consumerism", *Journal of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 31 (2024): 19.

18 Cfr. Javier Gafo, *10 Palabras claves en ecología* (Verbo Divino, 1999), 33.

19 We can cite the examples of the nuclear bombs, bacteriological bomb, biological bomb etc. These are examples which have direct impact to the nature and also to the people. Cfr. Francis, *Laudato si´*, nº 57.

1.3. Absolutism of Technology

Man has reached a technological development to the extent of challenging the work of God in the creation thinking himself as a creator. What was thought to be impossible to human being; is now converted to be the advance of a human intelligence. Technology seems to be the response to each and every question of a human being´s life. The absolute use of technology converts a man into a creator of all the beings of the planet.

The law of nature is being challenged by the trust of the science and technology. There should be a limit between what is tested and the norms that determines the ethical values of the experiment done[20]. A line of reasoning from the ethical point of view; should be a key point to evaluate the consequence of the technology. We cannot only make a technology as an "absolute being" that is considered to be the source and the end of everything. The technology should only be used as a means to attain a certain goal on condition that: all the ethical and moral norms should be a key guide.

2. THEOLOGY OF CREATION: CREATIVE RESPONSE TO ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

The Church has contemplated the significance of the creation as an important aspect in line with faith about the revelation of God. All creation comes from the good work of God. He created it out of nothing –*creatio ex nihilo*– not to show his majesty and power, rather out of love (Cfr. Gen 1, 1-31). The theology of creation seems to be put aside in the schools of theology due to the submissive and dependent attitude of rationalism, science and technology as the only means that respond human's needs[21].

Ecological movements have emerged to defend the environment[22], but unfortunately, some of these movements aim at benefiting themselves forgetting the

20 The technology reached has challenged even the dignity of a person. Now through science and technology, a process of a human growth from conception is taken just as a mere experiment. We are not contrary to the development attained in order to heal and detect many diseases that harm the process of human growth, rather we criticize all these utilitarian groups that use science and technology to manipulate the essence of a human being.

21 Cfr. Joseph Ratzinger, *Difficulties confronting the faith in Europe today: Meeting with the Doctrinal Commissions of Europe* (2 May 1989).

22 Every day emerges a movement which aims at being a forefront for protecting the environments. Generally we can categorize three epochs which can be termed as great movements which resulted to the rise of the present ecological movements. The first is believed to start on later 19th century. This epoch comprises of the conservationism with objectives of resource management such as forests, wildlife etc., and the preservation. The second epoch is known as the "age of ecology". This period is moved by the effects caused by the development of pesticides which led to lots of environmental impacts. A great author who is seemed to be a big influencer is Rachel

essential elements to be taken into account: creation has something to tell us about the revelation of God, reminding us that through it, we understand the beauty of its Creator and the creation shows the glory of God[23]. Thus, theology of creation should be at a forefront in the call to respond to the ecological crisis[24].

The best response that the Church offers for the ecological crisis is taken from the reflections of the documents emitted by the Second Vatican Council, promoting the call to respond to the 'sign of the times'. The constitutions and the decree, even if they were intended to create a climate of a good evangelization and how the Church could enter in the dynamic of the 21st century; from theological perspective, aimed at addressing the pastoral activities to which the generation needed the answer of different questions and anxieties.

The call to respond and study the "sign of the times" is still the best response of the church to the ecological crisis. Thus the ecological crisis is one of the important problems that direct us towards another great reality, that need a quick response: the human existence[25]. The ecological crisis was not seen as a question of urgent need by the Second Vatican Council, but a good number of documents have been addressing it in different ways, because the need to evangelize goes hand in hand with the care of the creation[26].

It will be a vain venture if we talk only about creation disconnecting it from the key motive of the act of creation which is the salvation of man and the universe[27]. Hence, the theology of the history of salvation must be connected with the theology of creation if we want to respond adequately to the problem of ecology. It is not easy to understand the theology of creation without understanding that it is through the act of creation; the coming of the Son of God for salvation of the universe acquires its meaning.

Carson´s with his book *Silent spring* on 1962. This book led to ecological awareness with impulse on the enactment of major laws such as *Clean Air Act*. Lastly, we can nominate as a diversification period, which starts from 1970´s to the present. Here is where we can note the progress on the environmental studies and defense of environmental health as a great issue to all the countries. Here is where, nations give much emphasis on anti-nuclear weapons, animal rights and also one of the famous concept called "deep ecology".

23 Cfr. Moltmann, *Dios en la creación*, 18-19.

24 The theology of creation is basing on the concept that; man is a steward of creation. He is the image of God who is put not to dominate the creation rather to take it as a gift and be a guardian.

25 Cfr. Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, nº 51. Pope Benedict XVI states clearly that: "*The Church has a responsibility towards creation* and she must assert this responsibility in the public sphere. (…) She must above all protect mankind from self-destruction. There is need for what might be called a human ecology, correctly understood".

26 We can refer to a specific document which teach about these aspects and draw a clear line of understanding about the teachings of the Church: Cfr. *Gaudium et spes* nº 4, 12, 57.

27 Cfr. Luis F. Ladaria, *El hombre en la creación* (BAC, 2012), 25-46.

God does not create out of whim; rather his motive is to show his love, intentioned to complete it in Christ as the culmination of all his love; knowing that through the act of incarnation of Christ; the definitive revelation of God has been shown[28]. The theology of creation is the anticipation of the call of the Church to integrate in the response of the ecological crisis, due to her bond with the history of man that began with creation and its end will be identified with the figure of Jesus Christ[29].

Creation is a gift of God to man who has the duty to care it due to its transcendental and physical aspects. For man, creation is a motive to contemplate the presence and actuation of God in the history of the universe (Cfr. Isa 6, 3; Jer 23, 24). Moreover, is through creation we come to recognize God's existence and his operation in the universe[30].

2.1. Creation as God's Sacrament

Sacraments are sacred and visible signs instituted by Christ to give us grace. They efficaciously make present the grace that they signify by the action of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit (Cfr. *CCC* 1084). Through the visible elements we are able to contemplate the transcendental aspects[31]. God always looks for us and attracts us to recognize his presence everywhere including in sacraments[32]. Salvation history is God's love to communicate and enter into relationship with a human being. God awaits the free response of man to be the steward of the created realities.

It will be difficult to get a solution to the current ecological crisis if we are not able to understand that before we talk of care for the environment, we should understand that it is the creation of God in which He manifests himself and through it we come to understand that God rests also in the land: "Thus says Yahweh: With

28 Cfr. *Gaudium et spes*, nº 22; *Dei verbum*, nº 2, 4. Heb 1, 1-4.

29 Cfr. Moltmann, *Dios en la creación*, 238-240.

30 Cfr. Koenig-Bricker, *Ten Commandments for the environment,* 137; Cfr. Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est,* nº 9.

31 Cfr. Edwards, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith,* 100-101.

32 Cfr. Cfr. Victor Ferrández Obradors, *Comprender y amar la naturaleza, dimensión ecológica del cristianismo* (San Pablo, 1996), 53; Cfr. *Gaudium et spes,* nº 16. We believe that God talks with man in his interior part that is a conscience. Here is where a human being solely responds to the call of God, and from here a man through his freedom can choose what is good and avoid what is bad. Also in the sacramental celebration, justifies that God comes to an encounter with a human being by letting him touch and experience his love and mercy.

heaven my throne and earth my footstool, what house could you build me, what place could you make for my rest?"[33].

The ecological crisis is a proof of a predatory behavior of man that should be corrected. Theology in relation to other field of studies makes us understand that creation is destined to salvation of man and the entire universe[34]. Nature is neither a landscape nor a storehouse of resources, but the sphere with which we must establish reciprocal relationships. Taking care of creation is a theological act of faith which needs the participation of man in this act of faith as a response to his mission to cultivate it.

2.2. Jesus and Environment

The life of Jesus, from the beginning, is related to the bond that exists between him and the environment. Jesus lived in a rural area occupying himself with agricultural activities, carpentry and pastures. It is possible to say that Jesus was living among the inhabitants in the countryside[35].

His environment is reflected in his way of transmitting his message of salvation. His preaching is not presented abstractly; rather he uses images from the realities surrounding him to explain his teaching on the Kingdom of God, a simple message that would easily be understood by all. He uses images from his life experience, from the concrete realities of every day's life[36].

His good news is proclaimed from natural environments, on the plain, mount, around the shore of lake. He seems to teach in an environment where his message could be heard by all, be it in the fields, mountains and the lakes, and by birds of the air. Jesus also taught in the synagogue, but it he was seldom found teaching in synagogues. He presented his message using examples from his surroundings in order to convey well his message especially the sermons directed to his audience. We cannot read the Gospels abandoning completely the environment in which Jesus taught[37].

33 Isa 66, 1.
34 Cfr. Luis F. Ladaria, *Introducción a la antropología teológica* (Verbo Divino, 1993), 44.
35 Cfr. Obradors, *Comprender y amar la naturaleza, dimensión ecológica del cristianismo*, 37-37.
36 Ibidem, 36.
37 There is a close connection between the life of Jesus and nature. This is not merely a normal human experience, rather a story of salvation that involves the whole creation. From his birth in Bethlehem, in humble surroundings amongst animals, to his death on the cross, nature is ever-present. His travels, his daily life and his work reflect a direct coexistence with the natural environment. During his public life, Jesus preached on

2.3. Jesus Christ: The beginning and the end of creation

Jesus Christ pre-existed as "*Logos*" of God before the created World (Cfr. Jn 1, 1-18; Cfr. Col 1, 17-18.) St. John in explaining the theology of the "Word" identifies Jesus Christ with a Word which had existed from the beginning, and is God (Cfr. Jn. 1.1). Jesus Christ is the firstborn of all the creation, and all creatures exist because of him (Cfr. Col 1, 15-16). If all were created for him, we have the reason to state that Jesus Christ is a perfect owner of creation. The existence of the universe depends on Jesus because from the beginning of the creation, God created through Christ; in Him and all things are maintained by Him. When God created the world, He already saw it in Jesus Christ as the beginning and end, in which all things will be consummated[38].

The mystery of creation is well identified by the act of incarnation. In Christ in whom all were created, God has revealed himself to us through the act of incarnation. The dignity of creation is well reflected from the one who has given its form and its essential aspect; that is the Logos of God[39].

Christ is the Lord. He is the owner of everything created and all are subject to Him. His Lordship is not comparable to human stewardship which is often subjected to authoritarian and despotic objectives. Christ is Lord by loving, protecting and showing solidarity with all his creation. Christ is above everything but at the same time he places himself as a servant to all. His service is marked by justice, truth, peace and freedom (Cfr. 1Cor. 8, 6).

Through Christ, nature is sanctified. Christ sanctifies the creation and consecrates it with his physical presence. Material realities are transformed by his physical presence. The whole nature, and not just human nature, has become sacred because divinity has penetrated it. In him, everything is unified; there is no dissociation. That is the reason by which most of the sacraments use material things from the nature, to signify this bond between the divine aspect and the material aspects. At the final end of this world, everything will return to Him (Cfr. Col. 2, 9).

roads, in fields and by the sea, interacting with ordinary people such as fishermen (Mk. 1, 16-20). He used natural elements in his teachings, particularly in parables, to explain the Kingdom of God (Mt. 13, 24-30; Jn. 15, 1-6). Furthermore, he sought out places such as the desert or the mountains to pray. Even in his death, creation participates symbolically.

38 Cfr. Francisco Conesa, "The nature of revelation in Vatican II", *Scripta theologica*, 45 (2013): 373.

39 Cfr. Juan L. Ruiz de la Peña, *Teología de la creación* (Sal Terrae, 1986), 129.

3. ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS: THOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE "SIGN OF THE TIMES"

The expression "signs of the times" comes from a biblical context (Cfr. Mt. 16, 1-4; Lk. 12, 54-56). It refers to the action of God in the course of history and also makes a close interpretation of the messianic irruptions. Jesus wants to alert to the Pharisees about their lack of concentration of the coming of the Son of God. "Sign of the times" consists of the assertion that, it is an opportunity and a means to show future hope from a Christian perspective.

The expression "signs of the times" is a theological place and relationship where the encounter between man and God takes place. God has revealed himself in history. This revelation has initiated the essential sign; that God is in the history of human life, which is none other than his revelation in Jesus. Our intention is to use its interpretation in order to determine the presupposed affirmation that the "ecological awareness" can be considered one of the "sign of the times" in the present time.

A clear interpretation is needed to find the correct meaning of the expression "signs of times" which nowadays has been used to consider whatever extraordinary events that happen, as "signs of times". Luis González Carvajal, claims that it is not easy to find a systematic interpretation of the "signs of the times"[40].

Furthermore, even though the closest meaning is that which describes the "signs of the times" according to the phenomena that occur frequently and distinguish one era from another, Carvajal warns that we must take into account the secular origin of the expression, which would later be used in the theological sphere. Although the 'signs of times' is a category apparently of secular use, its use in the theological sphere has prevailed, to the point of becoming a specific category to theological science[41].

In this passage from the Gospel (Mt. 16:1-4), the evangelist Matthew does not seek to describe a historical period or its atmospheric climate, even though he uses meteorological aspects. For him, talking about '*time*' refers to the time of Jesus. The precise translation of the Greek concept would be 'χρονισμός - *the right moment'* or rather *kairos*. Therefore, in the biblical sense, the "signs of the times" are interpreted in order to understand God's plan, which is revealed through events

40 Luis González Carvajal, *Los signos de los tiempos, El Reino de Dios está entre nosotros* (Sal Terrae, 1987), 9.

41 Ibidem, 19.

within the history of human life[42]. But these events must be discerned correctly in order to reveal God's will, to which the Church is uniquely committed and invited to respond[43].

3.1. Definitions of "sign of the times" from selected theologians

Our intention here is not to examine all the theologians, rather to have few representations to orient us to achieve a widely accepted understanding of the "signs of the times" which will enable us to affirm that the ecological awareness can be considered as a "sign of the times" theologically.

Salvatore Rino Fisichella understands the expression 'signs of the times' as "all historical events that manage to create universal consensus and enable understanding of the fundamental stages of human history"[44]. Fisichella invites us to delve into the essence of the expression. From a Christian perspective, Christ is the sign par excellence[45]. Through Christ the history of humanity enters a new stage with new horizons. "The 'signs of times' have come to mark the decisive moments for the life of men on earth: the history of Redemption and the end of history"[46]. In the presence of Jesus, a new era has begun, described as the Kingdom of God[47].

Félix Placer Ugarte offers us some aspects which will help us to reach our goal as far as the ecclesial interpretation is concerned. He defines the "signs of the times" as follows:

> "The signs of the times are objective facts that include historical and sociological elements that need to be reflected upon in the light of faith and responded to in accordance with their demands; events that appeal to the spirit of each individual, clearly and profoundly manifesting the current will of God"[48].

Ugarte shows an attitude to be reflected upon theologically. He argues that, events that determine the "signs of the times" must have evangelical criteria that

42 Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Roland E. Murphy, eds., *Nuevo comentario bíblico san Jerónimo, Nuevo Testamento* (Verbo Divino, 2004), 110.

43 Cfr. Gonzalo Tejerina, "Los signos del tiempo, susurros del Espíritu que llena el universo", in *Los gemidos seculares del Espíritu, LV Jornadas de Teología*, ed. Francisco García Martínez (BAC, 2025), 72-73.

44 Rino Fisichella, "Signos de los tiempos", in *Diccionario teológico enciclopédico*, ed. Luciano Pacomio and Vito Mancuso (Verbo Divino, 1995), 906.

45 Patricio Merino Beas, "Discernir los Signos de los Tiempos: Perspectiva Cristológica y Pneumatológica" *Franciscanum. Revista de las ciencias del espíritu*, 150 (2008): 15.

46 José Orlandis, *Los signos de los tiempos* (Rialp, 2006), 11.

47 Carvajal, *Los signos de los tiempos*, 25.

48 Felix Placer Ugarte, *Signos de los tiempos sacramentales* (Paulinas, 1991), 72.

reveal God's action. In these events, the presence of the Kingdom of God acting in them must be identified. From there, a pastoral theology is developed that assumes the will of God experienced in such events and will be reflected by the response of the believer who transforms this proclamation of the Kingdom of God into practices[49].

From this definition we can extract the following dimensions: reflection on the event in the light of faith, manifestation of the will of God through the objective facts that include historical and sociological elements. These key points will be the pivots in all the ecclesial interpretation of "the signs of the times" after the Second Vatican Council[50].

3.2. Ecclesial-theological interpretation of the signs of the times.

Theologically, we must recognize and appreciate the significant value of this expression after the Second Vatican Council. It has been widely used in various reflections, whether ecclesiastical or in the public domain. It probably even harmonizes with many other events occurring in society. But as can be understood, many of these uses can be confusing and erratic, comparing to the correct meaning of the category signs of the times in the theological sphere. The correct discernment and interpretation must always be carried out in the light of faith and the Word of God.

a) Marie-Dominique Chenu and the "signs of the times"

The Dominican theologian Marie Dominique Chenu plays a great role in the analysis of the criteria used in interpreting the "signs of the times". His contribution to the pre- and post-conciliar reflection is significant for interpreting the expression "signs of the times"[51]. For him, "Theology arises from the light that illuminates intelligence and knowledge in the events of salvation that unfold today"[52]. In other

49 Cfr. Ugarte, *Signos de los tiempos sacramentales*, 72.

50 The pastoral constitution *Gaudium et spes* has been a document which reflects the reality of the interpretation of this theological category. In it we can see how the Church responds to the need of the people of God. Cfr. *Gaudium et spes*, nº 4, 11, 44.

51 Cfr. Patricio Merino Beas, *La categoría teológica 'Signos de los Tiempos' desde el Concilio Vaticano II al Pentecostés de Aparecida y Francisco* (USTA, 2014), 112.

52 Jacques Duquesne and Marie D. Chenu, *Jacques Duquesne interroge le père Chenu: un théologien en liberté* (Le Centurion, 1975), 71.

words, theology arises from deep reflection on those events that are guided by the Word of God and are to be interpreted clearly [53].

When Pope John XXIII used the expression "signs of the times" in the apostolic constitution *Humanae salutis*, in some way, he was influenced by a theological background of the change of time that Chenu had been expressing as theologian in various occasions. Chenu's reflections had such a great impact on ecclesial life that we can say they were among those aspects that most influenced the theological renewal that led Pope John XXIII to think about the situation of the Church in that particular time[54].

For example, in the magazine *Signa du temps*, whose main purpose was to reflect on the daily issues in the Church and the world, we find him talking about it though did not give us a real sense of the expression "sign of the times", at least it shed light on what an expression that had already influenced the Church and the world was all about[55].

Bearing in mind what Chenu expresses, we can relate the ecological crisis as one of the aspect that has called the attention to almost the whole world. Its impact is contemplated from different study´s disciplines. Ecological crisis reveals the truth that a human being has not been responsible to the mandate from God, and also reveals the moral and spiritual deprivation of man who is to view the environment not only as a natural object but also a place where God manifests and reveals himself to the world and thus gives it a dignity as an essential element of God´s presence.

The call of the Church is to return to its theological interpretation where, the creation and nature is understood theologically as "God´s place of revelation" in which, all this history of salvation is well realized and contemplated. This can be

53 According to the interpretation of Chenu, when we refer to the theological explanation of the signs of times, we cannot opt for other thing than what the theology talks of the history of salvation. The entire hermeneutic paradigm, be it from the social aspect or historical aspects, should focus on the final destination which is the salvation. Thus to say; a proper interpretation should be accompanied by the Word of God and be received by a deep faith.

54 Existed one of the magazine in France named *La Vie intellectuelle*. In the year 1949 dedicated one section named "*Les signes du temps*". This part dedicated to collect, comment and make a serious study and reflection on significant monthly events in light of the Gospel in order to come up with a correct interpretation of the events according to the faith of the Church. Chenu´s reflections seemed to be most influential in sense that for him it could be as *Locus theologicus* and this called the attention to Pope John XXIII, Cfr. Eduardo Silva Arévalo, "La significación theológica de los acontecimientos. El estatuto histórico de la teología según Marie-Dominique Chenu" *Teología y vida*, 33 (1992): 271-272.

55 Cfr. Beas, *La categoría teológica*, 19; Cfr. Carvajal, *Los signos de los tiempos*, 21; Gilles Routhier, "Les signes du temps. Fortune e infortun", 80.

the orientation of theological interpretation of the signs of times with regard to ecological awareness.

b) Pope John XXIII: *Humanae salutis*

Pope John XXIII used the expression "signs of the times" officially for the first time in the papal Bull *Humanae salutis*. We can say that he was the first scholar to incorporate this expression into the official usage of the Church and especially into the official translation as a new term in ecclesiastical and, obviously, a magisterial vocabulary[56].

Pope John XXIII understood that we should prepare ourselves in matters of faith due to the great changes that have taken place in society. Based on the history of God's salvation, it is clear that "salvation comes through history"[57]. The Church, following the mission received from Christ, must be an instrument of hope and salvation to man who is within the history and walks in it[58]. Ecological crisis though was not one of the current issues when Pope John XXIII called for the Vatican session, but it was one of the aspects that touched the fundamental aspects of the faith of the Church. Just as we have the positive results of the Second Vatican Council about the emphasis on the pastoral concern, the correct use of the Word of God, correct teachings of the anthropologic sphere; the Church has also put emphasis on the family, the center of the human being in all labor activities, the respect of the order given by God etc. These anthropological aspects reflect the call of the Church to recognize the "human ecology" as one of the most important element in the ecological awareness responding to "the sign of times" recently.

Pope John XXIII recognized that the world had undergone significant changes that somehow made believers feel worried about the issues they see in history. The context of the epoch was like facing difficulties that had no answers to the problems afflicting humanity such as massive use of technology that threaten existence, expansion of the sophisticated arms which can destroy the whole world etc. Therefore, the Church was the only entity that could restore hope to the people. This was well expressed by Joseph Ratzinger:

56 Cfr. Marie D. Chenu, "Los signos de los tiempos, reflexión teológica", in *La iglesia en el mundo de hoy*, vol. II, ed. Yves Congar and Michel Peuchmaurd (Taurus, 1970), 254-255; Cfr. Gonzalo Tejerina, "Los signos del tiempo, susurros del espíritu que llena el universo" 67.

57 Joseph Ratzinger, *Teoría de los principios teológicos, materiales para una teología fundamental* (Herder, 1985), 182.

58 Cfr. Fisichella, "Signos de los tiempos" 1362-1363.

> "The human individual entrusts himself directly to the faith of the Church, not because he has come, through historical proofs, to the conviction that the events recorded in the New Testament are the indisputable center of all history, but because he finds in a World formed by and filled with faith a firm basis that gives his life meaning, salvation and shelter"[59].

Thus, the interest for the care of the creation is not only an obligation but also the act of faith to which a human being is called to practice his faith. A faithful is called to work for the care of the environment as his task to participate in the reconciliation of the creation in Christ.

In *Pacem in terris*, the Holy Father revealed in his reflections those things that mark the "sign of the times" in our epoch. In this letter, whose objective was to clarify and promote peace and the truth about life on earth, there are many indications of these aspects. The Church recognizes its great contribution to social development, especially in terms of equal rights, empowering women, solidarity and the vocation of the Church and society to cooperate as one of the great interpretation of the sign of times[60].

The aforementioned aspects seemed to be current issues in that time. We all agree that, solidarity, human right, equality between men and women are "signs of times" related to the present time when Church defends that the ecological awareness is well related to peace, human life defense, solidarity with those affected by climate change and emancipation of women who are direct victims of the effects of the ecological crisis.

Pope John XXIII proposed ways of interpreting the signs of the times, which we could say were based on two important aspects of human life. First of all; to understand the "sign of the times" as social events in history within space and time, from the perspective of technological experience and social changes that need a response; and secondly, biblical interpretations that are supposed to guide the Church's primary mission in the society, bearing in mind that the purpose of the Church is to prepare the path of salvation and manifest the Kingdom of God through evangelization[61].

59 Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology, Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, 154.

60 In this encyclical letter, Pope Juan XXIII makes a reading of "the signs of time" in the present time. Cfr. Chenu, "Los signos de los tiempos, reflexión teológica", 255; Cfr. Tejerina, "Los signos del tiempo, susurros del espíritu que llena el universo," 67-68.

61 Cfr. Pope John XXIII, *Humanae salutis*, nº 3-6.

c) *Gaudium et spes* on the signs of the times

If the Church intends to give response to humanity´s perennial questions, it must examine the signs of the times and interpret them in the light of the Gospel[62]. In *Gaudium et Spes* the expression "sign of the times" attained the highest status as a theological category.

Following the call of Pope John XXIII to address issues concerning pastoral activity in modern times, largely driven by globalization, the Second Vatican Council hoped to keep pace with modern times in planning well its pastoral work in order to achieve effective evangelization, since things and reality must be considered in themselves according to their nature, giving them their value as such in order to carry out an adequate pastoral discernment[63]. It is in this line of thought the Council speaks about the signs of times:

> "To carry out such a task, the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel (…). We must therefore recognize and understand the world in which we live, its explanations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics."[64]

3.3. Sociological-pastoral criterion for interpreting the "signs of the times"

In order to analyze this criterion, I use the definition of the "sign of the times" given by Marie D. Chenu. His definition does not leave aside the social phenomena found in society. Neither does he ignore the social phenomena when interpreting the call to live the Gospel of Christ. We have to recognize the hidden meaning in the phenomena in order to obtain the correct interpretation. Chenu defines:

> "Signs of the times are certain widespread phenomena that encompass an entire sphere of activity and express the needs and aspirations of humanity today. But these general phenomena are only signs when they are accompanied by a sudden awareness, in the movement of history"[65].

In this definition, Chenu emphasizes the phenomena that shake the world and characterize an era. Without doubt, the ecological crisis is worldwide issue. Addressing it is a form of letting people to be aware of its impacts in social, political,

62 *Gaudium et spes,* nº 4.

63 Cfr. Yves Congar, "Iglesia y mundo en la perspectiva del Vaticano II", in *La Iglesia en el mundo de hoy*, vol. III, ed. Yves Congar and Michel Peuchmaurd (Taurus, 1970), 22-23.

64 *Gaudium et spes*, nº 4.

65 Chenu, "Los cristianos y la acción temporal", 41.

economic and spiritual perspectives. However, not everything that shakes the world, and seems to affect social life deserves to be considered as a "sign of the times"[66]. The question which can be posed regarding this reality will be: What is the measure to use; in order to classify an event occurred as the "sign of the times"?

The first crucial thing is: facts must be interpreted in the light of faith. Christian faith moved by human experience believes that God is the origin of all creation and continues to unite with humanity. The call to be aware of the ecological crisis is an act of faith that needs a personal conversion as an initiative to respond to man´s responsibility in collaborating on God´s plan.

> "Faith does not consist in intellectually accepting specific truths drawn from the Bible. Faith consists in recognizing God's plan, the coming of the Kingdom of God. It is about recognizing the march of God's people in our times"[67].

Social events are visible and have significant influence on the way people live and think. The ecological question implies social dimension. The experience indicates that any activities which fail to respect the environment, causes harm to human society. They can disorientate the human community and that is why we affirm that, in the light of faith, we need to understand the hidden divine action.

As Benedict XVI expressed clearly that the Church does not only defend the earth, water and air as gifts of creation but must also protect humankind from self-destruction[68]. This truth confirms the church´s response to the signs of times and also responding to the need of the practice of faith. Faith does not remain in the immanence, but it transforms into a reality open to transcendence: it does not belong only to the visible world but transcends a calculable world opening itself up to contact with an eternal[69].

Jesus' mission was a struggle against the false Kingdom, perpetrated by injustice, violence, exploitation and oppression. This struggle was accompanied by gestures which he always insisted that his followers should maintain their faith in him and in God the Father (Cfr. Lk 17:11-19). Jesus recognizes the poor and the excluded to be God's preference. It is like saying that in the poor and the excluded God manifests himself[70].

66 Cfr. José Comblin, "Signos de los tiempos", *Concilium*, 312 (2005): 87-100, 91.
67 Comblin, "Signos de los tiempos," 98.
68 Benedict XVI, *Address to the members of the Roman curia* (22 December 2008).
69 Joseph Ratzinger, *Fe y futuro* (Sígueme, 1973), 31.
70 A good interpretation we can make is from Mt 25, 31-46. In this text, Jesus shows clearly that whatever is done to the least; it was done to him. We can classify the least including the poor who need a help.

The second feature of the interpretation seeks to respond to the main call of Christian doctrine, which integrates into the history of salvation[71]. The events interpreted under this initiative "become signs of divine will and reveal both, the openness to grace and aptitudes as well as the obstacles and refusals of today's world to listen to the word of God"[72]. Ecological awareness reminds a human being´s role as guardian who is called to act in sense of stewardship.

Finally, there is a prophetic-sacramental aspect of the phenomena. The events demand attention from believers and the Church. Although we recognize that there may be ambiguities because the sign of God's presence can be obscured by an anti-sign. The anti-sign can obscure the true signs of divine presence, so it should be interpreted in the light of the Word of God. "Knowing God implies putting oneself in a listening attitude"[73]. This is a necessary tool for interpreting the voice of God crying out in society. The crying of the poor[74] caused by climate change, the widening gap between developed world and developing world show the reality of the immoral act of a human being. Man needs to change his attitude in order to play his part not as exploiter but as a guardian of the garden of God. The prophetic task belongs to the whole Church and the faithful, and this task is always accompanied by the witness that is necessary in discerning the signs of the times enlightened by the word of God[75].

3.4. Historical-theological criterion of the signs of the times

Yves Congar uses the theology of history as his tool to understand the phrase "sign of the times". He examined the importance of events from theological point of view. He viewed them in relation to the history of salvation without denying their importance in the history of the world. It is like saying that, what is revealed by God is in the history of the world. Salvation history is not an independent entity rather an event which occurs in the history of the world. The Church participates in this history, and God has always manifested himself within history. Being in the world, the Church recognizes and interprets its presence in a theological perspective

71 François Houtart, "Los aspectos sociológicos de los signos de los tiempos", in *La Iglesia en el mundo de hoy*, vol. II, 212.

72 Ibidem, 212.

73 Beas, *La categoría signos de los tiempo*, 118.

74 Cfr. Leo XIV, *Magnifica humanitas*, nº 42.

75 Cfr. Leo XIV, *Magnifica humanitas*, nº 23 and 91.

because the history prepares the time of Jesus Christ when he comes to restore the Kingdom.

> "Those who speak of Signs of the Times acknowledge that there is something to be learned from time itself. This category of Signs of the Times would need to be clarified, as biblical, Christological, and eschatological references. But the most interesting aspect of the term is the intention implied in it. It is a matter of fully recognizing the historicity of the world, of the Church itself insofar as, although distinct from the world, it is nevertheless linked to the world. The movements of the world must have an echo in the Church. There will not be answers for everyone, at least not completely finished and adequate answers. But it will be known that it is not enough to repeat the same old lessons"[76].

The understanding of revelation is to be a constitutive element in our efforts to understand and interpret the signs of the times. There are events that carry within them a mystery that reveals divine manifestation, although they are not easy to discover due to their ambiguous nature.

> "The Signs of the Times point towards a more global, universal interpretation of revealed truth and compel the Church, in her teaching, to adapt that salvific message to the life and culture of human beings, which inevitably change and transform. Thus, in a certain sense, the Signs of the Times already belong to revelation, because they can be identified with those seeds of life, placed in the world and in the heart of every human being, through which it is easier to perceive the action of God who acts unceasingly in creation, in history and in human beings"[77].

We have to specify these events involved in order to identify the landmark events from the daily customs and practices. This exercise can be different if it is done by a believer or a non-believer.

> "(...) those historical events that manage to create a universal consensus, whereby believers are confirmed in their belief in God's immutable and dramatic actions in history, while non-believers are led to make increasingly true, coherent and fundamental choices in favor of the global advancement of humanity"[78].

An understanding of the signs of times from this perspective of salvation history recognizes that, the world and time have meaning because they reveal God's plan. God´s plan is not to make a human being created in his image to perish, rather to experience his love and be saved. Acts like solidarity with the poor, seeking of

76 Yves Congar, in Beas, *La categoría signos de los tiempos*, 114.
77 Rino Fisichella, *La revelación, evento de credibilidad* (Sígueme, 1989), 366-367.
78 Ibidem, 367.

justice whether environmental justice by returning the land to the poor of a particular place as indigenous people, or cultural justice by not exterminating them from their land, is part of collaboration in the process of salvation as part of the plan of God. There is a salvific dynamism accumulated in the events of history in the march of the world. But this can only be perceived in the light of faith and attentive listening to the Word of God.

The history of humanity is seen to be imbued with God's presence, making one perceive it with the presence of God through many significant events in history. Miguel Rubio Carrasco expresses three aspects that underline this statement: first, creation. Through it, God manifests his action. In creation, God consolidates the relationship between Himself and the world within the framework of history[79]. Second, it refers to divine incarnation and mission of the Holy Spirit in the world[80].

This is a living and active presence in which God shows his action within history and God enters directly to the life of a human being and live in him. Third, we recognize God's presence in history and in the world through the Church as a community of believers on a pilgrimage[81]. God acts and accompanies us, and thus the Church continues with the mission of Jesus Christ as his spouse.

3.5. Proposed suggestions of ecological awareness as the signs of times

The theological interpretation of the signs of times gives us room to draw some suggestions which we think will help Christians to respond to the signs of times regarding the ecological awareness. These suggestions are well related to moral and spiritual perspectives. One of them is the ecological conversion. This concept was introduced by John Paul II and well developed by Pope Francis to indicate the argument that defend the unity between practice of faith and the care of natural environment. Ecological conversion convokes a Christian to practice his faith by reshaping the way one relates with the environment recognizing the premise: care for the Earth is a spiritual and moral responsibility and not merely a practical or political issue.

Moreover, upholding the fundamental principle of respect for life is another proposal that indicates ecological awareness as the response of the signs of times in

79 Beas, *La categoría signos de los tiempos*, 119.

80 Cfr. Chenu, "Los cristianos y la acción temporal…", 47.

81 Cfr. Miguel Rubio "Los 'signos de los tiempos' como hermenéutica del acontecer de Dios en los acontecimientos de los hombres", *Moralia* 13 (1991): 20-22.

recent time. Human dignity must never be interpreted in isolation from the truth of the transcendental nature of the human person. Christians understand that the foundation of human dignity is set out in the Holy Scripture, Genesis 1:26-27. The person is not merely one object amongst many, but a subject loved by God for a specific mission. Defending the dignity of the person is a driving force towards economic and social progress, whilst promoting integral ecology.

However, we cannot talk of human dignity if we do not educate the sense of responsibility about the ecological aspects. Christians ought to invest in education aiming at fostering a broad and deep ecological responsibility based on respect for human beings and their fundamental rights and duties[82]. The best school which gives good values toward awareness of the ecological crisis is the family. In this, a person learns to respect others and love nature.

Another fundamental aspect is a review of a lifestyle. Just as Pope John Paul II proclaimed; "Today's society will not find a solution to the environmental problem unless it seriously reviews its lifestyle". Hedonism and consumerism should be replaced by virtues of austerity, moderation, self-discipline and a spirit of sacrifice as a way of showing solidarity with those suffering the negative consequences of the ecological crisis. These are some of the suggestions which we consider important in the course of responding and identifying the sign of times in the present time.

4. RESPONSE TO ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS AS A SIGN OF TIMES: THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

It is not easy to reach agreement on specific criteria that determine the signs of the times. Theologians have been debating whether there are universal elements for determining the interpretation of this expression. Research on the expression 'signs of the times' is based on approximation of theological interpretations, and there are many similarities between them, but still there are differences and difficulties, hence one can fall into a risk of correct interpretation[83].

82 Cfr. Benedict XVI, *Homily for the World Day of Peace* (1 January, 2010).
83 Cfr. Tejerina, "Los signos del tiempo, susurros del espíritu que llena el universo", 86-88.

4.1. Joseph Ratzinger's claims for the forgotten theology of creation

Joseph Ratzinger during a lecture given to the bishops forming the doctrinal committee, emphasizing what he claimed to be an almost disappeared theology of creation, pointed out what he believed to be the causes of this disappearance of the doctrine on the theology of creation[84]. Among the causes, is the desire to discover the world as a material object for human enjoyment rather than a gift from God.

However, he accused modernity of putting much emphasis on rationalism and rendering faith in creation useless. According to rationalism, faith does not help us understand creation. Man needs to be free of it (faith) in order to understand the creation[85]. Humanity focuses on technological advances that have plagued the universe to the point of becoming the power of this world, forgetting the absolute and the transcendence because God cannot be examined by natural science[86]. God has no place before this powerful human force which relies on reason and science.

If governing the world through science is what gives modern man the power to feel like the master of the world, then this spirit makes him self-sufficient, without meditating on the imperfection of man, who occasionally needs nature for his development. Experimental science is neither the answer to everything, nor an end in itself. It is a means to know, understand and contemplate the created world. Denying this dimension, man loses his horizon. Thus trusting in science and its power, he becomes an object of experimentation, forgetting the theological meaning contained in creation since the beginning of the world[87]. The result is the decline or loss of faith in God and Christ through whom and for whom all things were created (Cfr. Col 1:16).

4.2. The consistence between faith and deeds

Faith without deeds is useless (Cfr. Jas 2:14-26). When we believe that creation is important in God's plan for men, we will then act and care it because man is also a being created by God and was given the responsibility to care it. Lack of respect for the environment in which all creatures live will make it difficult for human beings

84 Ratzinger, *Difficulties confronting the faith in Europe today* (2 May 1989).

85 Joseph Ratzinger, *In the beginning, a Catholic understanding of the Story of Creation and Fall* (Burns & Oates, 1995), 82.

86 Cfr. Ratzinger, *In the beginning*, 84.

87 Ratzinger, *In the beginning*, 92

discern and understand the message conveyed by creation itself. Creation has sacramental, Christological and eschatological dimension[88].

The effects of environmental abuse manifest themselves in the way man govern his life which depend much on nature for air, food and even our work. These effects, remind us that our relationships with creation has been improper. It is necessary to change our way of life with regard to human relationships and environment. The negative impact of abusive relationships between men and their environment manifests itself not only in one place, but everywhere. We may say that the poor suffer most but we must not forget that the whole world suffers from these problems and is in agony (Cfr. Rom. 8:21-22).

We can affirm then that "ecological awareness" is a concept that can be considered a "sign of the times" because, first of all, it is something that affects God's creation as a whole and, from a theological point of view, it is studied from the perspective of the history of salvation and it needs to be interpreted through the study of human relations and their role in caring it because environment is an important aspect for man's existence. In ordinary language, the important elements for man's existence are from nature. Destroying ecosystems is equal to destroy man's existence. We say that the responsibility of man is to care for the world and recognize God's work of creation, which will be completed when Christ comes and restores all things (Cfr. Col.1, 15)[89].

CONCLUSION

The phrase "ecological awareness" can be taken as a "sign of the times" based on how the environment relates to man's everyday human life and his relation to salvation history which will reach to its fullness in Christ. The environment in its broad sense is a fundamental aspect of man's existence. Degradation of this means degradation of man himself and it is what some have called sin of ecology. Its importance in the life of men makes all who are working for its safety to present a landmark event because they are defending the work of God, which manifests God's glory, goodness and love as well as the interpretation of the salvation history. Luis Ladaria affirms as follows:

88 Cfr. Ratzinger *In the Beginning*, 15-18.
89 Ángel Cordovilla, *Dios creador* (Centre de Pastoral Litúrgica, 2017), 43.

> "We cannot understand the biblical notion of God's glory if we do not take into account what the manifestation of God's goodness and salvation means, which has taken place definitively in Jesus; in him God manifests his glory. There are obvious points of contact between the idea of creation in Christ and towards Christ and that of creation for the glory of God. From here we must study the problem in relation to the communication of God's perfections to creatures. How does the good of creatures relate to the revelation of divine closeness and goodness? The glory of God in relation to creatures, especially human beings, is manifested in the latter's participation in perfection and divine life; the glory of God produces a reflection of his goodness in human beings"[90].

A correct interpretation of the "signs of times" makes a believer to take his responsibility as co-creator. A human being is the only creature who has been given the responsibility to care for creation as a way of participating in the work of God. Thus, when taking care of it, a human being participates also in the mandate of God to cultivate it for the rest of other creatures. The call of God is to let a man recognize or be aware that he is a guardian of creation and not as despotic exploiter. This theological understanding of creation and the stewardship of man makes ecological awareness be considered as a "sign of the times".

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90 Ladaria, *El hombre*, 69.

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