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Vision of the human being in the Stockholm 72 conference: similarities and differences with Christian anthropology

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A solution to the current socio-environmental crisis requires consensus and agreement between people and groups with different visions (Pascual et al. 2023). Regardless of individual ideologies or beliefs, it is essential to find common ground and act collectively to address a global problem. This paper identifies the similarities and differences between the anthropological vision underlying the UN documents, in particular the 1972 Stockholm conference, and the Catholic anthropological vision of the encyclical *Laudato si'*. The analysis delves deep into Stockholm 72 (S72) and its historical context for two reasons. First, S72 was the first major international conference to comprehensively address the relationship between human economic development and environmental protection, leading the way for subsequent conferences in Rio, Kyoto, Johannesburg, Copenhagen, Rio+20, Paris, etc., which have led (so far) to the 2030 Agenda. Second, there is a need to establish a general methodology of anthropological analysis, hitherto non-existent, applicable to UN conferences. Delving into the very first one is instrumental to understanding how the social, economic, and philosophical influences of the time are reflected in its vision of the individual and collective human being, in its contents, and in the global environmental policies that followed. The comparison of S72 with the ethical vision of *Laudato si'*, and more broadly with Catholic Social Teaching (CST), reveals many anthropological points of convergence. These provide a strong basis for constructive dialogue between UN documents and the Christian worldview, which also strongly promotes the care of our common home.

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Introduction

This document thoroughly examines the content of the 1972 Stockholm conference (S72) (United Nations 1972), whose declaration is regarded as a fundamental pillar in the development of international environmental law (Paglia 2021; Pillai 2024). This research aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the anthropological vision underlying the Stockholm Declaration, comparing it with the Christian anthropology primarily expressed in the encyclical *Laudato Si'* (LS) (Francis 2015). *LS* has been widely recognised and cited in academic literature, especially in the fields of religious studies and sustainability (Ecker et al. 2024; Molina and Pérez-Garrido 2022; Mourao and Martinho 2021), and has contributed to the dialogue with the modern world (Schiermeier 2015), justifying its inclusion in this analysis.

The research addresses a central question: what was the context of S72? What anthropological vision is reflected in the declaration, and what are its similarities and differences with the vision presented in the CST? Existing studies highlight the growing impact of religion on environmental protection and suggest that integrating religion into environmental policies and programmes can enrich conservation strategies (Chen et al. 2021; Zemo and Nigus 2021). However, while ethical aspects of the S72 have been analysed (Ebbesson 2022), its anthropological vision and its relationship with specific religious perspectives, such as Christianity, have received little attention so far.

In this regard, the research helps fill a gap in sustainability studies by focusing on the dialogue between the anthropology of the UN and Christian anthropology. The novel contribution lies in identifying the implicit anthropological vision in S72 and its points of convergence and divergence with Christian anthropology as expressed in CST documents, thus promoting an ethical and conceptual dialogue between these two perspectives. Given that religion can play a positive role in environmental protection —as evidenced by the recent article in *The Lancet Planetary Health* on the work of the Catholic Church (Landrigan et al. 2024) this analysis is relevant and timely in the current context of environmental crisis.

Furthermore, this research introduces a unique methodology for analysing the anthropology in UN documents, something that has not been developed until now and which could be applied in the analysis of subsequent conference texts. This methodological proposal opens an underexplored field and contributes to a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the interaction between secular and religious anthropological thought on sustainability.

Methodology

This research follows a structured method, consisting of several distinct steps and approaches. First, to better understand the content of the S72 document, the sociological background; It also analyses the pre-S72 scientific, technological and industrial environment, the environmental disasters, the nuclear tests and the social and legislative reactions they triggered, as well as the influence of environmental thinkers and philosophers, situating their schools of thought in their historical evolution, which led to the beginnings of the environmental activism that is also described. After analysing the context, it examines how these ideas are reflected in the final declaration of the conference. The content, language and vision of the human being present in the text of the declaration reflect the background and the whole context of the time.

To identify the underlying anthropology, a study of the declaration content follows. Although the statement does not attempt to develop an explicit anthropological model, a vision of human beings and their relationships can be appreciated. For this purpose, a relational anthropological analysis was chosen, as it is considered appropriate for addressing the specific nature of the climate crisis. This crisis does not have a solely environmental origin and background but arises and develops within human relationships: between people, communities, institutions, and in their connection with the natural environment. It is, therefore, a phenomenon of individual and collective behaviour that requires an understanding of the human being both from the perspective of their conscience and responsibility (Chuvieco and Martin 2025; Jonas 1995) and from their condition of being-in-relationship with others (Buber 1993). The relationship with transcendence is included because in Christian thought, and Catholic thought in particular, the relationship with a creator God gives meaning and reason for caring for the environment, which is part of that "creation" granted by that God and deserves to be respected and cared for. This is one of the two anthropologies that are compared to find common ground.

Naturally, other types of anthropological analyses of the texts could have been carried out, some of them focusing only on one of the four approaches and certainly going into more depth but losing perspective in a view that we believed should necessarily be interdisciplinary, broad, and diverse.

Additionally, the relational vision of the human being is developed in diverse philosophical and religious traditions. In the type of anthropology proposed by the Catholic Church, the four dimensions are clearly present (Francis 2015: §60; Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace 2004, §109–114, 130, 132). Likewise, Jesús Ballesteros, in his work Personalist Ecologism, develops the inseparable relationship between care of nature and care of the human being. He thus reinforces the centrality of the person in their relational dimension and presents the human being as a dependent being and, at the same time, a guardian of nature (1995, 34–44). Along the same lines, Arne Naess, from deep ecology, emphasises the interdependence and expansion of the "self" to encompass the entire biosphere (Naess and Næss 1990).

There are also highly relevant authors who, from their own conceptual frameworks, develop a relational understanding of the human being in which these dimensions appear substantially, although not systematised under these categories. Among them, Panikkar (2021) stands out, whose interreligious and intercultural philosophy also provides methodological and epistemological support for this study. His relational foundation of reality and his notion of radical interdependence allow us to understand that no human dimension can be understood in isolation. His "Cosmotheandric" vision of ontological relationality integrates the cosmic, the divine (theos), and the human (andros) as interdependent dimensions. From this perspective, all human action has both an ecological and spiritual dimension, and harmony with creation is only possible by recovering a lifestyle founded on interdependence and communion.

On the other hand, relational anthropology also has an ecumenical scope, which is also important when we seek common ground for dialogue that helps solve a global problem. Olivier Clément, drawing from the Christian Orthodox tradition, argues that human identity can only be understood through the integration of its bodily, psychological, and social dimensions (Obrdlíková 2013). Jürgen Moltmann, a Protestant theologian, emphasised that the human condition is defined by reciprocity and interdependence (Obrdlíková 2013). Likewise, Murad and Tatay (2025) highlight the contribution of Orthodox ecotheologian Elizabeth Theokritoff, who proposes integrating Christian asceticism with a sustainable lifestyle. In the Islamic sphere, Seyyed Nasr warns that the ecological crisis is, above all, spiritual and requires recovering the sacredness of nature (Imran 2023

). In Judaism, Martin Buber conceives the human being as a being of encounter, whose identity is constituted in the dialogical relationship "I-Thou" (Buber 1993).

For the reasons stated above, the analysis of the documents is structured around these four constitutive relationships: the relationship with oneself, with others, with nature, and with the transcendent. As we have seen, this form of anthropological analysis is not new, but it has never been applied to the comparison of United Nations texts with documents of the Catholic Church, specifically to seek points of agreement that facilitate dialogue. This is indeed new and forms part of the contribution of this work. Within the individual dimension, the value of the human being with respect to the environment, their capacity to impact and be impacted by the environment and, finally, their visions of self-awareness and freedom will be analysed. In the second dimension, the relational nature, the view of the other, equality, non-discrimination, justice in relationships, and the dynamics of interaction from the individual to the international level are studied. Thirdly, the change in the way people relate to nature will be studied, followed by an analysis of the content of S72 regarding the relationship between human beings, transcendence, and spirituality.

The result of the findings will then be compared with Christian anthropology as described in the CST, aiming to identify similarities and differences. The objective of comparing the texts is by no means to conclude which is the best or most accurate approach, but rather to seek points of agreement, even if the anthropological foundations may have different origins. This common ground will help in the search for a constructive dialogue. Since the comparison is between texts produced at different times, a certain asymmetry could arise in the conclusions. Limiting the comparison of S72 solely to contemporary DSI documents would be insufficient, given that at that time Catholic doctrine on the matter was still incipient, because the Catholic Church was slow to take a position on this issue. But likewise, the S72 document was analysed as a product of its time and the historical and cultural conditions in which it was drafted. Therefore, it would be unfair to omit the most relevant later contributions of UN documents, and for this reason, they are included in summary form so as not to distort the focus on S72 or overextend the article.

Additionally, the method of analysis and identification used to extract the elements of agreement and divergence between the documents will be made explicit. This method can be applied to subsequent UN documents to facilitate comparative analysis and the identification of points of anthropological convergence.

Bibliographical references on the anthropology of UN documents are rare, including "On the Anthropology of the United Nations System"(Galtung 2019). Within each of the influence factors analysed (social, economic, historical, scientific, etc.), as well as in the analysis of the currents of thought of the time, the works of previous researchers in this field will be mentioned.

Key background factors and their impact on the Stockholm '72 conference. After 1945, international institutions began to address environmental issues. This trend intensified in the late 1960s with the rise of pollution concerns and environmental movements in the West. In 1969, the North Atlantic Council formed the NATO Committee on the challenges of modern societies to address environmental problems (Barrón López 2004). The OECD and UNECE also played an important role, setting up committees and organising environmental conferences (Borowy 2019; Janáč and Olšáková 2021).

The UN convened S72, led by Sweden, recognised for its proactive environmental policies (Kriström and Wibe 1997). Maurice Strong was appointed Secretary General of the Conference, which was opened by Kurt Waldheim and Olof Palme. The conference brought together representatives from 113 countries and more than 400 organisations, but without the Soviet Union and most of the communist bloc.

Four elements are analysed to assess their influence on the Declaration's anthropological vision.

Social context

Population growth and development: World population grew from 2.5 billion in 1950 to 3.7 billion in 1972, causing rural-urban migration and affecting social structure, resources and employment (Spengler 1973). This growth generated megacities with severe pollution and waste management problems. In the 1960s and 1970s, population growth and its environmental effects became critical in global discourse (Ehrlich and Holdren 1971; Meadows et al. 2022). Ehrlich (1971) in "The Population Bomb" warned of catastrophes due to population growth and resource scarcity, thereby initiating a global debate. The final declaration of S72 noted that population growth posed environmental problems, recommending the adoption of standards and measures (Procl. 5) and population policies approved by governments that respected human rights (Prin. 16). These discussions influenced global policies and future deliberations on the balance between development and environmental conservation.

Wars and the peace movement: The S72 emerged from a historical context marked by the Cold War and various other regional conflicts, such as the Vietnam War (1955–1975) and the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962). As Giugni and Grasso state (2015), this period also witnessed an accelerated arms race and the emergence of a strong anti-nuclear movement due to the risks of mass destruction and increased environmental awareness. The S72 underlined the urgency of protecting human beings and their environment from nuclear weapons (Prin. 26). The 1970 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) sought to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and to promote the peaceful use of nuclear energy under international supervision (Colijn 2003). The arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War posed a great danger to the global ecosystem, highlighting the importance of using science and technology to help protect the environment (Prin. 18). War conflicts, such as the Six-Day War (1967) and the use of Agent Orange in Vietnam, had significant environmental impacts, including deforestation and chemical contamination (Arnaud-Haond et al. 2009; Nam et al. 2016), although these ecosystems recover later (Duarte et al. 2020).

During the 1960s and 1970s, global peace activism, especially in the United States, emerged in response to the Vietnam War (1960–1975), with movements such as Students for a Democratic Society and Women Strike for Peace (Coburn 2021; Harrison 1993). Music also played an important role in promoting pacifism (Deaville 2018; Norton 2011). Figures such as Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, and John Lennon, among others, sang anti-war anthems, projecting the pacifist ideal on a global scale (Deaville 2018). S72 reflected the concerns of the peace movements, stressing the need for international cooperation and the abolition of nuclear weapons (Prins 24, 26). These principles balanced the right to development of states with the need to preserve the global environment, marking the beginning of international environmental law (Prin. 21).

May '68: This movement marked a turning point in France and the West, challenging the established order and calling for social, political and cultural transformation. According to Bui-Xuân (2019), this period of student and labour protests rejected social

structures that contradicted the aspirational values of society, evidencing a change in values (Capdequi 2018); philosophically, thinkers such as Foucault, Sartre, Marcuse, Debord, De Beauvoir, Guattari, and Deleuze challenged society's norms (Pestaña and Pino 2022), and their influence was evident in the S72, which promoted human rights, equality, and global engagement, reflecting the principles of May '68. The Declaration highlights the fundamental right to a dignified life in a quality environment (Prin. 1), the importance of environmental education (Prin. 19) and international cooperation on environmental issues (Prin. 22). These principles align with the spirit of May '68, which emphasised social justice and global political transformation.

Vulnerable groups: Although the term "vulnerable" was not used at the time, it is introduced here to examine the evolution of the view of these groups in subsequent UN documents. In the West, the 1960s witnessed significant social movements, including Martin Luther King Jr.'s fight for racial equality and social justice (Hodder 2021). Although the S72 focused on the environment, it also addressed demands for social justice, development and human rights. Principle 1 of the conference condemns *"policies that promote or perpetuate apartheid, racial segregation, discrimination, colonial and other forms of oppression."* The idea of dignity is present in this principle. Alvarez (1988) highlights the value of man's fundamental right to freedom and equality, resonating with M.L. King's speeches demanding equal rights and social justice. Similarly, the "Black Power" movement emphasised African-American self-determination and opposition to institutionalised racism in areas such as sports (Blackman 2019; Inghram 2006; Murphree 2004), and although it did not centre on environmental issues, its principles found echoes in S72's condemnation of apartheid and its respect for "value systems prevailing in each country" (Prin. 23), illustrating how these movements shaped S72.

The text of the S72 omits "children" or "the elderly", yet the inclusive nature of the document suggests a tacit consideration of the welfare of children as future custodians of the planet. No explicit references to "woman" can be found, reflecting the prevailing discursive norms of the time and the underrepresentation of women in positions of responsibility. During the 1970s, international for a prioritised development, environment and disarmament issues, relegating gender issues (Sarzynski 2021). Any mention of indigenous peoples in S72 was also absent. This can be attributed to the lack of global awareness of their rights and the limited political representation of indigenous peoples in international fora. However, indigenous activists were already prominent in environmental protection, such as the Chipko Movement in India (Singh and Mishra 2019). Agenda 21 (United Nations 1992) was the first UN document to recognise Indigenous peoples as key actors in sustainable development (Chapter 26).

S72 addressed the challenges of developing countries, protecting their sovereign right to exploit their resources and recognising the links between underdevelopment and ecological vulnerability (Prin. 4). International assistance - both financial and technological - was needed to address these challenges (Prins 9 and 12). In addition, of note is the relationship between economic stability and environmental management (Prin. 10), advocating for growth-enhancing environmental policies in developing countries (Prin. 11). In conclusion, although S72 did not explicitly mention certain vulnerable groups, its focus on human dignity, social justice, and equality suggests an implicit consideration of their needs and rights.

Global economic developments: After the Second World War, Western economies experienced a period of growth, the French called "Les Trente Glorieuses" (Glorious Thirties), characterised by high employment and the expansion of the welfare state (Noriega 2019), which favoured the emergence of new economic models. However, not all economists viewed growth linked to environmental degradation as a positive trend. For instance, Kenneth E. Boulding (1910–1993) introduced the concept of "Spaceship Earth" (1966), challenging the idea of unlimited resources and perpetual growth. He insisted on the importance of responsible management of limited resources and the interdependence between the economy and ecology in a closed system. Likewise, Ezra J. Mishan (1917-2014), in "The Costs of Economic Growth" (Mishan 1967), criticised the idea that economic growth is synonymous with progress. Mishan stressed the importance of measuring economic success in terms of quality of life and human well-being. In the 1970s, Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen (1906–1994) introduced the idea of entropy in economics (1971), arguing that growth based on non-renewable resources is unsustainable. Similarly, E.F. Schumacher (1911–1977), in "Small Is Beautiful" (1973), criticised conventional economics and proposed "appropriate technologies" to benefit local communities, challenging the use of GDP as an indicator of well-being. The importance of technologies that directly benefit local communities was emphasised (Hazeltine and Bull 1999).

These economists rejected unlimited growth and resource exploitation, promoting the inclusion of ecological criteria in economic analysis. S72 also highlighted the relationship between economic development and environmental protection, underlining the need to allocate resources for environmental preservation in the global economic context (Prins 8 and 12).

The role of the media: In developed countries, economic growth and technological advances accelerated media expansion, while in Africa, Asia and Latin America, progress was slower and more complex (Fourie 2009). During the Cold War, the media played a key role as a tool of propaganda and disinformation, shaping public perceptions and ideologies (Bishop 2021; Rodríguez-Andrés 2017). It raised awareness of social, political and environmental challenges, influencing human behaviour and values (Koutsopanagou 2020; Shrum et al. 2005). Events such as the coverage of the 1968 Tet Offensive in Vietnam showed the power of television on public opinion (Culbert 1998). In the 1970s in Germany, the media emerged as a key political player, researching public opinion in order to influence public perceptions (Kruke 2004). The use of nuclear energy was also a relevant issue; Gamson and Modigliani (1989) highlight how the media discourse influenced public opinion on this use. The combination of television, the press and photography contributed to the formation of the environmental movement (Anguish 2015), with in-depth coverage of environmental disasters that raised public awareness of pollution and the need for more effective regulation.

The S72 stressed that the media should promote educational information for the protection of the environment (Prin. 19). Dyring et al. (1973) highlight the profound influence of the media in shaping environmental awareness and promoting sound environmental education. However, media representation of the Amazon and its indigenous peoples in the 1970s reinforced stereotypes and supported development policies that ignored their rights (Sarzynski 2021). In short, the media significantly influenced the discussions, principles and resolutions of the S72, but science and technology also played an important role.

Scientific, technological and industrial context. Scientific, technological and industrial advances after World War II gave rise to unprecedented growth, but also heightened awareness of its environmental costs (Schumacher 1973). Examples include the 1948 Donora smog in Pennsylvania, which killed 20 and sickened

thousands and the 1952 Great Smog of London, which lasted five days, caused up to 12,000 deaths and led to the 1956 Clean Air Act (Davis 2002; Guissani 1994; Polivka 2018). The Minamata disaster in Japan, caused by the release of mercury in 1956, poisoned thousands of people (Takaoka et al. 2018). Other events, such as the radioactive leak at Windscale Piles (Penney et al. 2017) in 1957 and the oil spill in Santa Barbara, California, in 1969, contributed to increased environmental regulation, including the US National Environmental Policy Act of 1970 (Spezio 2018).

Between 1951 and 1992, more than 1000 nuclear tests were conducted near Las Vegas, including Operation Plumbbob in 1957, which released radioactivity into the atmosphere, thereby seriously affecting public health (Peterson and Miller 2008). In the Pacific, nuclear tests in the Marshall Islands and other regions also caused environmental and health damage. These events led the S72 conference to stress the need to globally review the environmental impacts of industrial and technological development, to protect the oceans and seas and to foster international cooperation in managing these effects. Furthermore, the conference underlined the importance of freeing human beings and the environment from the effects of nuclear weapons (Prins 6, 7, 21 and 26). Since then, the relationship between humans and nature has been seen as one requiring care and responsibility to preserve the environment, human survival, and dignity.

Influence of ecological thinkers and philosophers. The historical and philosophical context that led to the S72 is key to understanding the evolution of environmental thinking and practices. Movements such as romanticism, preservationism and conservationism were central to this transformation. In the late 19th century, the US advocated the protection of nature in its original state. Henry David Thoreau, who promoted simple living and harmony with nature and advocated civil disobedience against unjust laws (Thoreau 1893). John Muir, founder of the Sierra Club, campaigned for the creation of National Parks and protected areas. Ansel Adams, known for his photographs, defended the preservation of national parks in the United States (Chuvieco and Martin 2015).

Conservationism, also in the USA in the late 19th century, advocated balancing exploitation and conservation for long-term benefit. Gifford Pinchot, first chief of the US Forest Service and Julian Huxley, the first director of UNESCO, played key roles in this movement. Aldo Leopold (1887–1948), with his influential work, "A Sand County Almanac" (1949), introduced the "land ethic", which argued for a responsible relationship between people and the environment. This vision was echoed in S72, underlining the human responsibility to protect the environment for future generations (Prin. 2). Leopold argued that the interdependence of ecology and economics is concerned with the impacts of human population growth (Meine 2022). Rachel Carson (1907–1964) is best known for her book "Silent Spring" (1962), which warned of the dangers of pesticides such as DDT. Her work urged society to reconsider its approach to nature and advocated a more committed environmental ethic (Prin. 6). Carson had a significant influence in the emergence of the environmental movement (Burns 2020), while Barry Commoner (1917–2012), articulated the "Four Laws of Ecology" (1971), increased awareness of the interdependence of ecological systems (Prin. 2) and criticised capitalism, calling for collective responsibility and the promotion of greater civic engagement in ecological issues. Just before S72, Van Rensselaer Potter (1911–2001), a precursor of the term "bioethics", studied the relationship between humans, their environment and technology in his work *"Bioethics: Bridge to the Future"* (1971), advocating the integration of science and ethics to balance human welfare and environmental preservation (Prin. 18). For his part, Arne Naess (1912–2009) developed deep ecology in 1973, questioning the anthropocentric approach of the S72 (Prin. 1), and advocating an intrinsic respect for nature. These thinkers and movements, amplified by growing media attention, contributed to a heightened public awareness of environmental concerns. S72 marked a significant milestone, as it formally acknowledged the global responsibility to protect the environment.

Beginnings of environmental activism. Environmental awareness was not only growing in academic and political circles but also gaining momentum in civil society (Caldwell et al. 1976). These social movements, which emerged from conflicts, were seen as positive drivers of change (della Porta 2014). In 1892, John Muir founded the Sierra Club in San Francisco, which soon became a benchmark for environmental conservation in the United States and inspired the creation of conservation groups worldwide. In the UK, the Nature Conservancy Council (1949) and the World Wide Fund for Nature (1961) promoted biodiversity protection, while Friends of the Earth, founded in 1969, focused on grassroots campaigning and political action for environmental change.

With the rise of anti-nuclear movements globally, nuclear energy began to be seen not as a neutral technology but as a subject of dispute and opposition. Protests against both nuclear weapons and the civilian use of nuclear energy became widespread (Giugni and Grasso 2015). Greenpeace, founded in 1971 in response to nuclear tests in Amchitka, Alaska, marked the beginning of a global environmental movement despite failing to stop the tests (Harter 2004). Similarly, Earth Day, first celebrated on April 22, 1970, was initiated by Senator Gaylord Nelson and mobilised millions of people in the US, becoming a milestone in global environmental awareness (Dietz 2020). In the same decade, the women-led Chipko Movement in India championed forest conservation through non-violent protests, inspiring similar movements worldwide (Singh and Mishra 2019). Wu and Wen (2014) examined environmental activism in East Asia since the postwar period, highlighting the role of NGOs and the influence of political context and democratisation. Unlike in the West, these movements faced significant political repression. The principles of the S72 partly reflect the demands of these movements: the right to a quality environment (Prin. 1), international cooperation and collective responsibility (Prins 21 and 22), the protection of fauna and flora (Prin. 4), and the promotion of environmental education (Prin.19). The interaction between environmental movements and the Stockholm principles demonstrates the transformative power of activism in international politics (Giugni and Grasso 2015).

The social, scientific, and industrial context, along with environmental activism, reflect an emerging, new relationship between humans and nature. At this point, the analysis turns to the anthropological debate.

Discussion

Human beings and their relationships at the UN Stockholm conference. In order to study the anthropology of S72, it is necessary to define human nature -something which is a historically complex issue subject to various interpretations. Since this study seeks to facilitate dialogue between Christian thought and UN documents, it uses Catholic encyclicals and the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church as key references (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (PCJP) 2004).

Before addressing the analysis of the documents according to the areas of human relationships, it is worth noting that, even when similar values or terms are used, the foundations that support the vision of the human being differ substantially

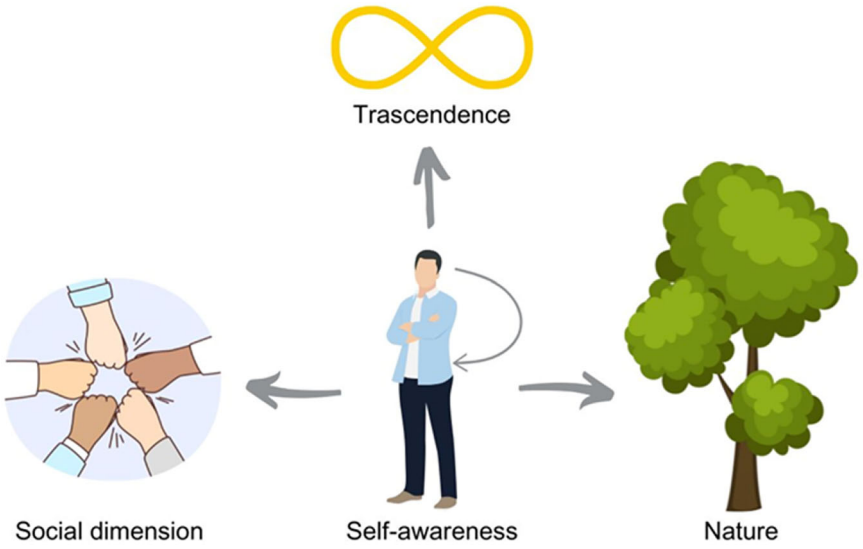

Fig. 1 Relationships of the human being.

between the perspectives considered, depending on the nature of each institution. The vision of the human being, in the Christian tradition, is based on the imago Dei and the Platonic philosophical heritage (Nnaemeka 2022), integrating body and soul with a vocation for co-creation and preservation of life (Šehić 2023); in the UN, it is based on inherent dignity and universal human rights (Hughes 2011), with a secular approach oriented towards the promotion of substantial freedoms (Czerny 2012). Human dignity is recognised as an intrinsic value of divine creation ((PCJP 2004 §109–114,130,132); Šehić 2023) or affirmed without religious justification (Hughes 2011), depending on the framework. Social responsibility is conceived as the stewardship of life and participation in co-creation (Šehić 2023), or as the guarantee of basic rights and the promotion of justice (Hughes 2011). Regarding the care of nature, the Christian perspective grounds it in the mission received from God to cultivate and protect creation (Šehić 2023), while the UN perspective bases it on the need to preserve the environment as a condition for human life and sustainable development (United Nations 1992).

The analysis of the relational anthropology methodology from which both documents are analysed is represented in Fig. 1: from the relationship with oneself, through interpersonal and social dynamics, to the interaction with the environment, and ultimately to the relationship with transcendence.

This approach allows for a deeper understanding of how the underlying anthropological vision can influence and reflect the global policies and decisions discussed in international fora (John XXIII 1963, §7), as well as the complementarity between religious ethics and secular ethics (Zagonari 2021).

Relationship with oneself. The first consideration of CST on human nature is that of the unity of body and spirit. With this unity, a person can reflect on their own destiny, finding themselves superior to the material world (PCJP, §127–129). Human beings enter into a relationship with themselves (self-awareness) and can reflect on themselves, understanding their being as body, soul, heart and consciousness (PCJP 2004, §108–112; Vatican II 1965, §14). According to CST, the human being is affirmed as a unique and unrepeatable entity, existing as a self, capable of self-understanding, self-possession and self-determination (Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), §357; PCJP, §131). This leads to a unique respect for human dignity (Francis 2015, §90), promoting the care of life and the means to live in dignity (Vatican II 1965, §26).

S72, like the CST, stressed the centrality of humans: "Of all things in the world, people are the most precious." It reflects, however, an anthropocentric view that places humans at the epicentre of ethical and value considerations, arguing that humans possess an intrinsic value superior to that of other biological entities or environmental components. It highlights the need to ensure the well-being and fundamental rights of individuals, urging societies to forge conditions conducive to a full and meaningful existence. The above-mentioned statement carries ethical and moral implications, calling for human decisions and actions to be guided by respect for the dignity and intrinsic worth of each individual, especially where vulnerable groups are concerned. Human dignity is presented as an important theme of the declaration, stating "Man has the fundamental right to freedom, equality and adequate conditions of life, in an environment of a quality that permits a life of dignity and well-being, and he bears a solemn responsibility to protect and improve the environment for present and future generations" (Prin. 1). This principle underlines the interdependence between human well-being and a healthy environment, condemning policies that promote apartheid, discrimination and other forms of oppression, reaffirming that human dignity is universal. The difference in the grounding of human dignity between the CST and the S72 lies in their focus: while the CST grounds dignity in divine creation, granting each person an intrinsic, absolute, and universal value, the Stockholm Declaration bases it on the right to a healthy environment, linking dignity to equitable access to resources and adequate living conditions. Thus, the CST emphasises the spiritual and transcendental dimension of dignity, whereas S72 connects it to material and social well-being.

Both S72 (Prin. 2) and CST (John Paul II 1987, §34) mention the intergenerational relationship in caring for nature, reflecting the awareness of the temporal interconnectedness among humans. There is a difference in the approach between S72 and CST: the former is more oriented towards the development of policies and regulations, while the latter seeks to motivate a cultural and ethical change. Both approaches are complementary, as public policies require a solid moral foundation, and cultural change needs the support of legal and political structures that facilitate and promote sustainability.

Thus, as an essential element in Christian anthropology is the self-awareness (Francis 2015, §18) of the human being, which implies a recognition of oneself, one's actions and the impact they can have on the world around us. If human beings are 'made' by their environment, this suggests that our environment shapes who we are, our cultures, values and ways of life. This awareness enables a deeper understanding of the ways in which human actions impact the environment and how, reciprocally, the environment influences humanity. The declaration also acknowledges the human being as a being capable of discerning good (Procl. 3) and transforming the environment towards development. In Christian doctrine, the sharing of goods and resources is authentic development, where it is not only ensured by technical progress, by mere relations of convenience, but also by the power of love, opening the conscience of the human being up to reciprocal relations of freedom and responsibility (Benedict XVI 2009, §9).

Both CST (Benedict XVI 2009; Francis 2015. §202) and S72 stresses education and self-awareness of the human being as essential for continuous progress (Prin. 19). The Conference stresses that human beings have reached a stage in their evolution where, thanks to science and technology, they have acquired the power to transform their environment in countless ways (Prin. 18). This capacity for transformation - and the awareness of its impact - is also a manifestation of self-awareness. In line with this perspective, human beings in the 1970s became increasingly aware of the consequences of their actions and took on the responsibility to act (Prin. 18, Jonas 1979; Paul VI 1967, §30; Paul VI 1971, §21). Furthermore, S72 (Procl. 6) reflected a vision of freedom that acknowledges ecological interdependencies and recognised that human actions have had a significant impact on the natural world. Therefore, the fullness of freedom is not achieved solely through individual self-determination, but also through the creation and preservation of those environmental contexts that allow all living beings to thrive.

In conclusion, the analysis reveals a strong emphasis on the value of the human being in both the S72 and the CST, placing the human being as a recipient of the benefits of the environment and as a custodian and shaper, highlighting the uniqueness and dignity of the human species and the responsibility that goes with it.

Interpersonal and social dimension. Christian anthropology affirms that human beings, by their very nature, are social beings and cannot live and develop without relating to others (Vatican II 1965, §12), where men and women stand in relation to each other first and foremost as custodians of their own lives (John Paul II 1995, §35). The person is not to be seen as an absolute individuality or as a functional cell in a system, but as part of an organically ordered whole with diverse relationships (PCJP 2004, §125). S72 also highlights the relational nature of the human being, stressing the importance of equality, non-discrimination, justice and the value of peace. It emphasises shared responsibility from the individual level to the international level, stressing the need for management that respects equality (the term equity is not used in the declaration) and encourages cooperation.

A point in common between Christian anthropology and the Prins present in S72 is that of solidarity towards others (Francisco 2020, §125). This point has been maintained up to the current SDGs of the 2030 agenda, whose first SDGs focus on eradicating poverty, fighting hunger and improving health, to cite just a few examples of actions or duties of love towards others promoted by Christianity. In this context, S72 also addressed issues related to equality and non-discrimination (Prin. 24). It also reflects a growing awareness of the relationship between environmental justice and developing countries, recognising the differences between developed and undeveloped countries, while respecting their specific needs and priorities (Prin. 12). The conference stressed the need to support the just struggle of the peoples of all countries against pollution (Prin. 6).

In relation to justice, S72 underlined the importance of providing technical and financial assistance to developing countries (Prin. 9), helping them to address environmental challenges and promote sustainable development. The conference linked environmental problems and poverty (Prin. 8), recognising that many of the environmental problems in developing countries were related to poverty and a lack of access to basic resources, emphasising the need for development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the prospects of future generations (Prin. 2). While the document recognises the importance of respecting cultural diversity and traditional knowledge, given the context of the time, it does not specifically address the rights or concerns of Indigenous peoples or women. The Declaration underlines the importance of equality and justice for peoples in the global context, condemning discriminatory policies (Prin. 1) and supporting the just fight against pollution (Prin. 6), emphasising cooperation and equality in international environmental issues (Prin. 24) and recognising the right of countries to exploit their own resources, underlining national autonomy within global environmental responsibility (Prin. 22). Likewise, CST advocates an interdependent approach to tackling environmental problems (Francis 2015, §164), underlining the importance of offering solidarity to the weakest states (Francis 2015, §170). In the encyclical Fratelli Tutti (2020, §32), Francis reminds us that "no one is saved alone." The link between environmental problems and poverty (Prin. 8) is intertwined with the need to combat poverty and protect nature (Francis 2015, §10,49).

The human social condition gives rise to dynamics of collective responsibility. The S72 stresses the participation of all actors in society at different levels, underlining joint and equitable action between "citizens and communities, enterprises and institutions, at all levels" (Procl. 7) for the care of the environment and human well-being. The declaration addresses the sovereignty of states to exploit their resources, balancing this right with the obligation not to cause environmental damage beyond their borders (Prin. 21). At the international level, it calls for cooperation between states to develop international environmental law and promote agreements to mitigate negative impacts (Prins 22 and 24), underlining the role of international organisations in environmental conservation (Prin. 25). It recognises the diversity of national values and contexts, urging consideration of the particularities of each country in the implementation of environmental regulations (Prin. 23).

Similarly, CST affirms that the international community must find institutional ways to manage the use of resources with the participation of non-developed countries (Benedict XVI 2009, §49, 50). CST addresses the personal and collective responsibility in relation to nature, technology and morality, about what the human being is, can do and must be (PCJP 2004, §16), which is not an arbitrary and selfish freedom of exploitation (CCC 1992; PCJP 2004, §113).

The common good (Prin. 18) in Stockholm is echoed in the denunciation of the "throwaway" culture and the promotion of the common good in CST (Francis 2015, §157; John Paul II 1987, §38; Paul VI 1967, §76; Vatican II 1965, §26). Both documents emphasise collective responsibility and the need for joint action to protect the environment, highlighting the importance of research, innovation and education (Prins 7, 19, 20; Francis 2015, §14, 135, 209) for environmental conservation.

The value of peace among nations is also a common ground between the principles of the S72 and Christian anthropology. In the Christian tradition, peace is a gift of God, a commandment to

mankind, and is an essential requirement for sustainable development and nature conservation according to the UN (SDG 16 of the Agenda 2030). It also appears in the S72 (Prin. 26). In this context, peace movements reaffirmed the notions of peace and non-violence, fostering compassion and empathy in spirituality, leading to an environmental ethic that underlines human responsibility towards the planet. Religious traditions began a dialogue with environmental and peace movements, integrating issues of ecology and peace into their teachings. For example, Pope Paul VI, in his encyclical Octogesima Adveniens (1971, §21), made explicit the unconsidered exploitation of nature and its dramatic consequences for humanity.

In conclusion, S72 establishes an integral environmental responsibility that involves individuals and collectives at all levels, promoting solidarity, equality, justice and peace. However, it does not explicitly mention family or non-contractual relationships. The declaration balances state sovereignty with international responsibility and respects national diversity, stressing the importance of joint and equitable action to protect the environment. The importance of the family, underlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Art 16), would appear in subsequent UN documents (the Cairo conference on population and development in 1994, which the UN designated as the year of the family, and in the Beijing conferences and the Copenhagen declaration, both in 1995).

Relationship with nature. The S72 was a milestone in the global reflection on the intrinsic relationship between humans and nature (Choy 2015). The first proclamation states: "Man is both the work and the maker of the environment around him", reflecting how humans are shaped by their environment, but also how they have the capacity to transform it through their actions. This statement highlights the interconnectedness (Francis 2015, §67, 138) and human responsibility in environmental management. This same idea is developed in LS when dealing with integral ecology (Francis 2015, §138–142).

At the same time, S72 anticipated the human right to a quality environment, essential for a dignified and healthy life (Ebbesson 2022). Although there was no regime linking human rights and the environment, the conference affirmed that both are vital to basic human rights and well-being (Prin. 2). A quality environment is an integral part of the right to liberty, equality and adequate living conditions and not just a means to secure these rights (Ebbesson 2022). The conference did not address the intrinsic value of nature, but its usefulness for present and future human beings (Prin. 2). The seven points of the preamble highlight the interdependence between humans and nature, recognising that protecting the environment is key to global well-being and economic development and the responsibility of all governments. The responsible management of resources for the benefit of present and future generations was underlined, with emphasis on avoiding the depletion of non-renewable resources and sharing their benefits equitably (Prin. 5, Benedicto XVI 2009, §49).

This relationship is widely cited in Catholic Church documents. However, to cite them all would be too extensive. Prior to *LS*, CST affirmed that the relationship of human beings with the world is an essential part of their identity, and creation is a constant object of praise (PCJP 2004, §452). Christian anthropology has denounced the extreme anthropocentric vision (John Paul II 1979, §15) and underlined the importance of respecting the interconnectedness and order of the cosmos (Juan Pablo II 1987, §34).

S72, influenced by its context, reflects an anthropocentric view with a utilitarian approach in several of its Prins (Prizzia 2017). The primacy of the human being is underlined in the affirmation that "the human being is the most precious thing" (Procl.5). Economic development is presented as essential to ensure a favourable environment and improve the quality of life, prioritising economic growth over environmental conservation (Prin. 8). Furthermore, it reaffirms the sovereign right of states to exploit their resources according to their environmental policies, reflecting a perspective centred on national interests (Prin. 21). The absence of an explicit recognition of the intrinsic value of nature reinforces the idea that nature is valued primarily for its utility to humans (Prin. 2).

The Christian vision presented in *Laudate Deum* (Francis 2023, §67) and *LS* proposes a "situated anthropocentrism" that overcomes extreme anthropocentrism. It views humans as a species within nature, tasked with protecting the Earth. This perspective emphasises humans as the conscious and intelligent part of nature, uniquely aware of their role and vocation as caretakers (Francis 2015, §69). Francis advocates an anthropocentrism based on mutual care and respect, recognising the intrinsic value of all creation before God, beyond economic utility (2015, §33). This approach promotes a reciprocal relationship between humans and nature, rejecting both arbitrary domination and the equalisation of all species. Unlike ecocentrism, which views humans as merely another species without responsibility, the Christian approach underscores humanity's duty of care for the biosphere.

Through their similarities and differences, both texts enrich the global dialogue on the relationship between human beings and the environment, underlining the importance of a holistic approach and the primacy of the human being.

Transcendent dimension. S72 does not explicitly address any transcendent dimension but indirectly alludes to the spiritual by acknowledging the environment's role in shaping human well-being and inner development (Procl. 1). It promotes shared values such as dignity and responsibility, which resonate with many spiritual traditions. CST, however, like all monotheistic religions, grounds transcendence in theological terms: humans are created in the image of God and are called to communion with their Creator (CCC 1992, 357). For Ballesteros, S72, by placing the human being as "the most valuable of worldly realities," implicitly recognises a dignity that transcends the biological, a foundation that the author links to the capacity for care and responsibility, in tune with the monotheistic vision of the human being as an exceptional being within creation. Although the text does not explicitly mention the notion of imago Dei, Ballesteros maintains that it is difficult to defend the primacy of human dignity—especially in a context of ecological crisis—without assuming, at least implicitly, this idea, which underlines the unique character of human beings and their vocation as custodians of creation. (Ballesteros 1995).

Human nature, as described by CST, is composed of both matter and spirit, imbued with meaning and transcendent purposes (Benedict XVI 2009, §48). Moreover, *CST* considers creation itself as an expression of divine love (Francis 2015, §77, 88), envisioning the universe as a system open towards divine transcendence (Francis 2015, §70). *It f*urther invites an openness to dimensions that transcend the purely scientific, promoting a spirituality that challenges the notion of dominion over the earth and advocates for universal fraternity inspired by St. Francis of Assisi (Francis 2015, §11,75,10). Unlike the CST, which emphasises a theological foundation, UN approaches aim for an inclusive universality that transcends religious and cultural boundaries, focusing instead on values that all peoples can agree upon, continuously seeking consensus.

Later contributions of United Nations documents. Following S72, the UN progressively incorporated and developed aspects related to a relational anthropology. It is important to note that

Table 1 Comparison: The human being in itself.

Aspect	Stockholm '72	Christian Anthropology	Coincidences
Value of the person	"Of all things in the world, people are the most precious"	Created in the image and likeness of God.	It is the most valuable thing in nature.
Intrinsic value of life	Not mentioned	Emphasises the importance of openness to life.	
Freedom	It is a right	It is intrinsic to human beings, leading them to live within an ethical and moral framework.	The fullness of freedom includes the responsibility to care for nature.
Responsibility	Human beings are the work of the environment that surrounds them.	Custodian of creation, of a gift received.	All must apply their knowledge in harmony with nature. Shared responsibility.
Self-awareness	To be able to discern the good and, in so doing, "ennoble their existence"	It involves a recognition of oneself, one's actions and their impact.	Human awareness of the impact on nature. Education on environmental issues is indispensable.

several of these themes were not present in S72—for historical and contextual reasons—and that their inclusion in subsequent documents reflects the evolution of international environmental thought. This approach avoids anachronistic comparisons with Laudato si' (Francis 2015), whose broader thematic scope also reflects a more advanced historical, scientific, and political framework. In this sense, the advances of the following decades demonstrate the UN's journey toward concepts that are now key to environmental protection.

Agenda 21 (United Nations 1992) emphasises the protection of vulnerable groups (Chapter 6), referring to infants, women, indigenous peoples, and people living in poverty, recognising their unequal exposure to environmental risks. The same document incorporates a gender perspective for the first time (Chapter 24), affirming the vital role of women in environmental management and promoting their equitable access to resources, education, technologies, and decision-making, without using the term empowerment. The family does not appear in environmental texts, although the Cairo Program of Action defines it as the "basic unit of society" (UN Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis 1995, 30) and recognises its cultural and social diversity. It partially coincides with the Social Welfare and Development Initiative (DSI), which conceives of the family as a community formed by a man and a woman (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1992, §1033).

Regarding Indigenous Peoples, Agenda 21 (Chapter 26) recognises them as key actors, a recognition reinforced by the Convention on Biological Diversity (1992, Article 8.j), which calls for the preservation of their knowledge. The DSI, especially in LS (Francis 2015, §146,179), values their spiritual connection to the land. The intrinsic value of ecosystems is formulated in the preamble to the Convention on Biological Diversity (Naciones Unidas 1992, art. 8), which recognises biodiversity for its own sake, beyond its usefulness. LS (Francis 2015, §118,140) only developed this notion in 2015. Climate change entered the UN discourse with Resolution 43/53 (UN General Assembly (43rd sess.: 1988–1989), 27; 1988), which promoted the creation of the IPCC. Its first report (*History — IPCC*, n.d.) placed it at the heart of environmental diagnosis. In the DSI, it appears in the Message for the World Day of Peace *(Benedict XVI, 2008)* and is extensively addressed in LS as a moral, ecological, and social challenge.

The phenomenon of consumerism and the economy as a tool to protect the environment also did not receive enough attention. The "polluter pays" principle was first mentioned by the OECD (1972), although in the S72 it only appears implicitly in Principle 22, which is more related to justice between countries. Mechanisms such as emissions trading would be formalised in the 1997 Kyoto Protocol.

The connection to spirituality in S72 was tenuous and not linked to religious beliefs (Historia—IPCC n.d.). These absences reflect the evolution of the environmental discourse and the need to adapt international agendas to emerging challenges.

Conclusions

S72 reflects the context and society of its time in its language, as well as its prevailing anthropology. It was a milestone in the global reflection on the relationship between human beings and nature (Ebbesson 2022), placing humans at the centre, in line with the Christian vision of human dignity and responsibility towards the environment. When comparing the anthropological background of S72 with the Christian worldview, one finds several points of convergence in terms of freedom, responsibility and self-awareness in relation to environmental care (see Table 1). Both documents highlight the role of human beings in responsibly managing their impact on the environment, with the well-being of present and future generations in mind.

In both texts, the human relational character is analysed at different levels. The UN focuses on relationships between states and nations, while Christian anthropology adopts a more universal view, from the individual to all of humanity and creation. Both emphasise the importance of values such as solidarity, cooperation, equality, social and environmental justice, research, innovation, education, the common good, and peace, all necessary for the care of people and the natural environment (see Table 2). A key difference, however, is the absence of significant references to the family as the fundamental cell of society in the UN framework.

S72 takes an anthropocentric view with utilitarian overtones, focusing on economic development and rational exploitation of resources to ensure human welfare. In contrast, Christian anthropology today proposes an anthropocentrism in which the human being is seen as the caretaker of creation, recognising the intrinsic value of all creatures, the importance of openness to life in all its forms and promoting a relationship of respect and reciprocity with the environment. Both documents stress the urgency of the issue and the interdependence of humans and nature (see Table 3).

The relationship of the human being to transcendence is treated very tangentially in S72 but reflects shared values that could be linked to it, such as the interconnectedness of life, shared responsibility towards the environment and human dignity (see Table 4). The UN seeks universality, focusing on what

Table 2 Comparison: The human being in relation to others.

Aspect	Stockholm '72	Christian Anthropology	Coincidences
Relational nature	It focuses on relations with the state.	Constitutive of the human being. Importance of the family, the communities, and the principle of subsidiarity.	The analysis ranges from personal relationships to international relations. Collective responsibility. Justice among peoples.
Solidarity and cooperation	Developed countries should assist developing countries.	Charity is an essential value for living authentically the faith.	They look after poverty and the health of the most disadvantaged.
Equality and respect	Condemns apartheid.	"Inequity affects not only individuals, but entire countries and forces us to think about the ethics of international relations."	Equality and respect for all persons
Protection of the vulnerable	Not addressed Yes, at subsequent conferences.	Emphasises (children, elderly, disabled), throwaway culture.	
Women's value, equality	Not mentioned Yes, at subsequent conferences	Recognised and promoted.	It is taken for granted in the equality of all human beings
Violence and Abuse	Not mentioned.	Addressed in the context of social justice.	
Value of Indigenous communities	Not mentioned Yes, at subsequent conferences	Valuing and protecting their rights and knowledge.	It is taken for granted in the equality of all human beings
Equality in economic development	Provide technical and financial assistance to developing countries.	The foreign debt of poor countries as an instrument of control.	It recognises the differences between developed and undeveloped countries. Justice.
Environmental justice	It supports the just struggle of the people of all countries against pollution.	It integrates a more ethical perspective on the interconnection between social and environmental justice, criticising certain power structures.	It is intertwined with the need to combat poverty and protect nature.
Common good	Environmental problems are part of the common good.	CST principle. Integral ecology is inseparable from the common good.	The environment is part of the common good.
Peace	Mainly focused on the effects of nuclear weapons.	It is a gift from God and a commandment to men.	A necessity for human and environmental well-being.
Vision of technology	The risks are beginning to be understood.	Rejection of the technocratic paradigm and the discarding of people.	The need for responsible and ethical use of science and technology

Table 3 Comparison: The human being in relation to nature.

Aspect	Stockholm '72	Christian Anthropology	Coincidences
Relationship with Nature	Utilitarianism: resources for human benefit. It insists on avoiding burnout and sharing its benefits.	Situated anthropocentrism.	They stress interdependence, recognise that environmental protection is crucial for global welfare and economic development.
Respect for the environment.	The value of environmental care in itself is not mentioned.	Intrinsic value of all creatures and caring relationships.	There is an urgent need to rethink and deepen this relationship between humans and nature.
Economic development is poorly integrated with nature.	Priority to economic growth to improve the quality of life.	Criticism of consumerism and emphasis on sustainability.	Both recognise the importance of improving the quality of life.
Education and communication	Relevant role of the media	Call to create a "green citizenship"	Aimed at the whole population and from different areas.
Environmental Climate Change and Biodiversity	Superficially mentioned	Comprehensively addressed	Increasing recognition in subsequent documents of the importance of these issues.

Table 4 Comparison: The human being in relation to transcendence.

Aspect	Stockholm '72	Christian Anthropology	Coincidences
Relationship with Transcendence	Not mentioned.	Central to the Christian vision. It allows us to reflect on the meaning of life.	They reflect values such as the interconnectedness of life, shared responsibility for the environment and human dignity.
Transcendence-nature	Importance of the environment for spiritual development and human well-being.	Footprint of God's presence in the world.	There is a relationship between the environment and the spiritual development of the human being. Holistic understanding.

all peoples can agree on to reach consensus. This common ground facilitates a fruitful dialogue to address the environmental problem. S72 and CST show that there is a considerable common ground for dialogue between different anthropological visions, both religious and secular. S72 laid the foundation for international environmental law, while CST brings a spiritual and ethical dimension that deepens interconnectedness and responsibility towards nature.

S72 does not address certain issues which can be grouped into two categories. The first group of absences reflects their historical context, as many issues that are obvious today did not yet form part of the public debate. Subsequent UN conferences have included the protection of vulnerable groups, the role of women, the importance of the family, valuing indigenous communities, caring for animal life, biodiversity, tackling irresponsible consumption, the challenges of climate change and diverse forms of pollution. The dual role of the economy was also recognised, both as a cause of the environmental problem and as a potential solution if properly managed. The second group of absences is more permanent, due to the universality required in UN agreements, avoiding confessional approaches due to the diversity of beliefs and ideologies.

S72 marked the beginning of a long road towards Agenda 2030, laying the foundations for continued evolution in global environmental policy and management. This event was the first step towards a more holistic and multidimensional approach to environmental and social problems, which has been refined over time. The evolution of environmental discourse has integrated ethical, social and cultural aspects, recognising human nature's interdependence. The comparative analysis between S72 and CST is thus relevant not only from the point of view of environmental studies, but also for anthropology, ethics and social sciences, contributing to an interdisciplinary understanding of contemporary challenges.

Although this article has focused on the analysis of the anthropological assumptions implicit in S'72 and its dialogue with the anthropological proposal of CST, it is worth noting that many of the principles articulated in Stockholm found continuity decades later in the 2030 Agenda. The participation of non-state actors—such as NGOs, Indigenous communities, and the private sector—promoted in 1972, along with the creation of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), laid the foundations for an inclusive approach that remains central to current global sustainability frameworks (Chasek 2022). In this case, the analysis has been limited to S'72, although the relational anthropological methodology adopted opens new avenues for future research on other relevant documents within the UN system.

Data availability

No new datasets were generated or analysed during this study. The research is based on qualitative analysis of existing documents. All relevant materials are publicly available and cited within the article.

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Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Use of artificial intelligence (AI)

Generative AI tools were used exclusively for language editing. The authors take full responsibility for the content and conclusions of the manuscript.

Ethical approval

This research did not involve any direct interaction with human participants. Therefore, ethical approval was not required. The study is based exclusively on the qualitative analysis of documents.

Informed consent

Informed consent was not required, as the study did not involve human participants.

Additional information

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