



***COUNCIL OF THE CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN BISHOPS  
PILGRIMAGE BUDAPEST – MARIAZELL***

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***Introduction:***

I greet all of you heartily in the name of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace; and on its behalf, I bring you prayerful wishes for a successful pilgrimage.... *And ecological pilgrimage.*

It is, certainly, a great pleasure for me to be here and to participate in this Pilgrimage of the Commission of the European Bishops' Council for the Safeguard of Creation. I hope that your journey thus far has been spiritually uplifting and mentally enlightening.

With regards to the protection of the environment as a safeguard for peace, any number of themes could have been addressed. For this presentation, I would like to concentrate on the words of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI in his Message for the World Day of Peace 2010. The Holy Father has spoken of the subject of the environment on many occasions. In this year's Message he addressed the subject in general terms which allowed him to touch upon many items of concerns.

*If you want to cultivate peace, protect creation.* The theme of Pope Benedict XVI's Message for the World Day of Peace is important because, "...creation is the beginning and the foundation of all God's work."<sup>1</sup> One can not help but recognize that there are many threats to peace in the world today. Wars, conflicts, international and regional tensions and the injustices that many people are forced to endure are witnessed every day. Along with those threats to peace with which people burden other people are the threats to peace that mankind carries out against the earth on which we live and the gifts that God the Father has promised to all people for all ages. For this reason His Holiness found it is essential that humanity establishes a new relationship with creation.

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<sup>1</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, 198.

***Creation, the work of God's hands, in the hands of man:***

As Pope Benedict XVI wrote in his Encyclical Letter, *Caritas in veritate*: “The environment is God's gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole. When nature, including the human being, is viewed as the result of mere chance or evolutionary determinism, our sense of responsibility wanes. In nature, the believer recognizes the wonderful result of God's creative activity, which we may use responsibly to satisfy our legitimate needs, material or otherwise, while respecting the intrinsic balance of creation. If this vision is lost, we end up either considering nature an untouchable taboo or, on the contrary, abusing it. Neither attitude is consonant with the Christian vision of nature as the fruit of God's creation.”<sup>2</sup>

An understanding of creation helps us to answer the questions that have been asked down through the ages. Through creation, we come to know who we are, where we are from and where we are going. Twenty years ago, Pope John Paul II, used as a theme for his Message for the World Day of Peace 1990: *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all of Creation*. Attention was drawn to the relationship that we, as creatures of our Creator, have with the world around us. “In our day”, he wrote, “there is a growing awareness that world peace is threatened not only by the arms race, regional conflicts and continued injustices among peoples and nations, but also by a lack of due respect for nature, by the plundering of natural resources and by a progressive decline in the quality of life...Faced with the widespread destruction of the environment, people everywhere are coming to understand that we cannot continue to use the goods of the earth as we have in the past.”<sup>3</sup>

Of course, this was not the first time that a Supreme Pontiff found an occasion to speak on mankind's relationship with the environment. In 1971, on the occasion of the eightieth anniversary of the publication of *Rerum Novarum*, the groundbreaking social Encyclical Letter of Pope Leo XIII, Pope Paul VI also warned of the coming peril: “Man is suddenly becoming aware that by an ill-considered exploitation of nature he risks destroying it and becoming in his turn the victim of this degradation. Not only is the material environment becoming a permanent menace - pollution and refuse, new illness and absolute destructive capacity - but the human framework is no longer under man's control, thus creating an environment for tomorrow which

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<sup>2</sup> Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter, *Caritas in veritate*, 48.

<sup>3</sup> John Paul II, Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace, 1.

may well be intolerable. This is a wide-ranging social problem which concerns the entire human family.”<sup>4</sup>

With these two references it may appear that the Church wakes from a sort of slumber to call attention to the world in which we live. It is not that the Church finds her voice only every twenty years or so – even a quick study will show that many statements and calls for focus, attention and action have been made through the years, regarding the world and the environment in which we live and with which we share with other living creatures. Pope John Paul II described the situation as a “crisis” that called for a “new solidarity.”<sup>5</sup> What labels can be used today so that a new focus can be placed upon the present situation? Pope Benedict XVI made it a point to speak of the necessity of renewing our understanding of solidarity in addressing the protection of creation.

The Message was not intended to address any particular issue within the context of our created world. It was not directed at climate change or global warming but rather a focusing on all aspects of the great gift given to mankind by God our Creator. Increases in the amounts of urban and industrial waste that is generated, the burning of fossil fuels, the more widespread use of chemical herbicides, fertilizers and pesticides, deforestation and irresponsible agricultural practices that contribute to desertification, the destruction of natural habitat which also leads to a breakdown in biodiversity and the exploitation of natural resources through pollution of water and air must all be addressed.

Shifts in weather patterns have already given proof of changes in the global climate resulting in crop failures, decreased productivity, more widespread food insecurity and the migration of those forced from their homes. At the center of all of this is mankind’s respect for life. That the protection of creation has moral implications cannot be denied. Respect for the life of each and every person can not be pushed aside for the sake of economic, industrial or agricultural production. It is a question about respect for human life and the conditions in which we find ourselves. Pope Leo XIII first addressed these conditions, with regards to labor.<sup>6</sup> Environmental degradation often comes as a result of furthering purely economic interests which can too easily become dehumanizing and, most unfortunately result in a hostility toward creation.

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<sup>4</sup> Paul VI, Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens*, 21.

<sup>5</sup> John Paul II, Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace, 10.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter, *Rerum Novarum*, 36.

### ***Creation, a Gift of God in the hands of man:***

In addressing the idea of creation as a gift, it is necessary to turn to the first verses of the Book of Genesis. There we see that God, already present in the emptiness, created from nothingness the heavens and the earth, “We believe that God created the world according to his wisdom. It is not the product of any necessity whatever, nor of blind fate or chance. We believe that it proceeds from God’s free will; he wanted to make his creatures share in his being, wisdom and goodness.”<sup>7</sup> Light followed, along with a separation of the waters above and below the firmament and the dry land from the waters of the earth. During the following days, plants, birds and other living creatures were created through the Father’s will. God looked upon the world that He made and, “saw that it was good.” Still, on the sixth day the work of creation was not completed. God created man and woman in his image and likeness, “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good” (Gen 1:31). It was then that God blessed mankind saying, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” (cf. Gen. 1:1-29)

If indeed we come to know God with certainty through his works,<sup>8</sup> we can not help but see His goodness because he himself call his creation “good”. The author of the Book of Genesis then wrote that God walked in the garden that he had created. (3:8) The creation of man and woman brought about a relationship between mankind and all the rest of creation. Even after the sin of Adam and Eve, God did not rescind his command. After being forced from the garden of Eden, they maintained the dominion that God had granted to all mankind. An understanding of the meaning of dominion is essential to our relationship with the world.

Both Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II spoke of the exploitation of the environment. The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, in the paragraphs devoted to ‘The Crisis in the relationship between man and the environment’, noted: “...man’s pretension of exercising unconditional dominion over things, heedless of any moral considerations which, on the contrary, must distinguish all human activity.”<sup>9</sup> In mankind’s relationship with creation we must move as far from being “exploitative” or exercising “unconditional dominion” as is possible. The true meaning of exercising dominion, in the context of the Book of Genesis should not be seen as simply “exercising authority” but rather “being responsible.”

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<sup>7</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, 295.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 286.

<sup>9</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 461.

In this way, mankind participates in the process of creation along with God the Father. As pointed out in the *Compendium*: “Man, then, must never forget that his capacity to transform and in a certain sense create the world through his own work . . . is always based on God's prior and original gift of the things that are. He must not “make arbitrary use of the earth, subjecting it without restraint to his will, as though it did not have its own requisites and a prior God-given purpose, which man can indeed develop but must not betray. When he acts in this way, instead of carrying out his role as a co-operator with God in the work of creation, man sets himself up in place of God and thus ends up provoking a rebellion on the part of nature, which is more tyrannized than governed by him. If man intervenes in nature without abusing it or damaging it, we can say that he “intervenes not in order to modify nature but to foster its development in its own life, that of the creation that God intended. While working in this obviously delicate area, the researcher adheres to the design of God. God willed that man be the king of creation. In the end, it is God himself who offers to men and women the honour of cooperating with the full force of their intelligence in the work of creation.”<sup>10</sup> The work of creation continues to this day with a greater sense of urgency.

Many people in many countries and regions are already witnessing increased hardships in the face of mankind’s neglect or refusal to take responsible authority over the environment – to be a true shepherd of the created world. The actions of mankind that have led to a depletion of the quality of water and air and the use of land has come to a critical point. As Pope John Paul II pointed out: “The profound sense that the earth is “suffering” is also shared by those who do not profess our faith in God. Indeed, the increasing devastation of the world of nature is apparent to all. It results from the behavior of people who show a callous disregard for the hidden, yet perceivable requirements of the order and harmony which govern nature itself.”<sup>11</sup> “God destined the earth and all it contains for the use of every individual and all peoples.”<sup>12</sup> These words guide our understanding with regards to the common heritage that the Church recognizes exists within creation. “The present rhythm of exploitation is seriously compromising the availability of some natural resources for both the present and the future. Solutions to the ecological problem require that economic activity respect the environment to a greater degree, reconciling the needs of economic development with those of environmental protection. Every economic activity making use of natural resources must also be concerned with safeguarding the environment and should foresee the costs involved, which are to be considered ‘an essential element of the actual cost of economic activity’. In this context, one

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 460.

<sup>11</sup> John Paul II, Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace., 5.

<sup>12</sup> Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 69.

considers relations between human activity and climate change which, given their extreme complexity, must be opportunely and constantly followed at the scientific, political and juridical, national and international levels. The climate is a good that must be protected and reminds consumers and those engaged in industrial activity to develop in their behaviour a greater sense of responsibility.”<sup>13</sup>

It is here that the imbalance that exists between developing and developed nations and regions must be addressed. It is a question, not only concerning the common good but it is a question of justice. This brings me once again to the difficulties that many people are already experiencing in their lives regarding environmental degradation. The imbalance between the rich and the poor must be addressed within the scope of the management of the gifts that creation has to offer and in which each of us has a right to share.

Protection of and the care for creation is the responsibility of everyone. It knows no borders. Unfortunately, there are many obstacles both economic and nationalistic. The “new solidarity” to which Pope John Paul II referred and the “global solidarity” addressed in last years’ Message (8) will be essential tools in the work ahead. “Modern ecological problems are of a planetary dimension and can be effectively resolved only through international cooperation that is capable of guaranteeing greater coordination in the use of the earth’s resources.”<sup>14</sup> “Nor must one forget the contribution that every nation is required in duty to make towards a true worldwide cooperation for the common good of the whole of humanity and for future generations also.”<sup>15</sup>

Returning to the understanding of God’s command for mankind to have dominion over creation, it may be an opportune time to turn also to the idea of dominion taking the form of the way a shepherd acts towards the flock. In the Gospel of St. John, Jesus told his disciples that, “A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”(10:11) There is a call here, not to simply be willing to sacrifice but indeed to suffer for the sake of the preservation and protection of creation. This sacrifice can take many forms. “Serious ecological problems call for an effective change of mentality leading to the adoption of new life-styles, in which the quest for truth, beauty, goodness and communion with others for the sake of the common good are the factors that determine consumer choices, savings and investments. These life-styles should be inspired by sobriety, temperance, and self-discipline at both the individual and social levels. There is a

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<sup>13</sup> Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 470.

<sup>14</sup> Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 481.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 166.

need to break with the logic of mere consumption and promote forms of agricultural and industrial production that respect the order of creation and satisfy the basic human needs of all. These attitudes, sustained by a renewed awareness of the interdependence of all the inhabitants of the earth, will contribute to eliminating the numerous causes of ecological disasters as well as guaranteeing the ability to respond quickly when such disasters strike peoples and territories. The ecological question must not be faced solely because of the frightening prospects that environmental destruction represents: rather it must above all become a strong motivation for an authentic solidarity of worldwide dimensions.”<sup>16</sup>

A ‘renewed global solidarity’ does not lessen the responsibility of a region, nation or individual. Care for the environment can no longer be seen as the responsibility of someone else or everyone else. Environmental standards that are realistic need to be established. They must be realistic to help guarantee that they will be met and maintained. Standards that are elevated beyond reason will be too easily dismissed as unreachable. The setting of standards will come only when world leaders recognize that protecting creation is a means, not only for the avoidance of environmental and ecological catastrophe but as an essential means for peace. This recognition will certainly also lead to a new spirit of peaceful relations and cooperation among and with the world’s nations. This solidarity must also be extended to individuals. “The phenomenon of consumerism maintains a persistent orientation towards “having” rather than “being”. This confuses the ‘criteria for correctly distinguishing new and higher forms of satisfying human needs from artificial new needs which hinder the formation of a mature personality’. To counteract this phenomenon it is necessary to create ‘life-styles in which the quest for truth, beauty, goodness and communion with others for the sake of common growth are the factors which determine consumer choices, savings and investments’. It is undeniable that styles of living are significantly influenced by different social contexts, for this reason the cultural challenge that consumerism poses today must be met with greater resolve, above all in consideration of future generations, who risk having to live in a natural environment that has been pillaged by an excessive and disordered consumerism.”<sup>17</sup>

***Educating for Respect of Creation and for Peace (Right and Wrong attitudes):***

The role of education in the context of society and the world in which we live was addressed by Pope John Paul II: “An education in ecological responsibility is urgent: responsibility for oneself, for others, and for the earth. This education cannot be rooted in mere sentiment or empty wishes. Its purpose cannot be ideological or political. It must not be based on a rejection

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 487.

<sup>17</sup> Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 360.

of the modern world or a vague desire to return to some "paradise lost" . Instead, a true education in responsibility entails a genuine conversion in ways of thought and behavior. Churches and religious bodies, non-governmental and governmental organizations, indeed all members of society, have a precise role to play in such education. The first educator, however, is the family, where the child learns to respect his neighbor and to love nature;<sup>18</sup> and the first content of education on "*creation*" is that, it is the work of God's hands: *a cosmos, established by God's Word*.

There must also be a renewal of the recognition of human dignity and an acceptance of the inviolability of human life and the worth of the human person. This returns us to the fact that protection of creation truly is a question of morality. In many of today's societies, so often driven, it appears, by the need for instant gratification, have in many ways shown that they have lost not only their focus on life's ultimate mysteries and goals but also that they have lost sight of the relationship established with God in the process of creation and regained by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As a result, interest, care and concern for others has been lost. A true sense of sacrifice is needed in order to redirect society's focus first on its members and then toward the gift of creation.

If given the opportunity, the earth might be able to heal herself. This will take place only if humanity is willing to take the steps in order to allow it to happen. At the same time, it is a poignant fact that so many people find comfort, renewal and rejuvenation when they are close to the beauty and serenity of creation. As we move to protect creation, we find that it in turn cares for us. Innumerable pieces and examples of art and music have been devoted to praising the glories of creation. In so doing, they also praise the Creator. The attitude of exploiting what appears to be an infinite supply of clean air, drinkable water, non-renewable energy and natural resources must change. "A correct understanding of the environment prevents the utilitarian reduction of nature to a mere object to be manipulated and exploited, it must not absolutize nature and place it above the dignity of the human person himself. In this latter case, one can go so far as to divinize nature or the earth, as can readily be seen in certain ecological movements that seek to gain an internationally guaranteed institutional status for their beliefs. The Magisterium finds the motivation for its opposition to a concept of the environment based on ecocentrism and on biocentrism in the fact that "it is being proposed that the ontological and axiological difference between men and other living beings be eliminated, since the biosphere is

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<sup>18</sup> John Paul II, Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace, 13.



considered a biotic unity of undifferentiated value. Thus man's superior responsibility can be eliminated in favour of an egalitarian consideration of the 'dignity' of all living beings."<sup>19</sup>

By no means is this a call for a new "pantheism". Nothing could be farther from it. We realize that we are part of the created universe. Life did not spring into existence spontaneously. It was by the will of the Father, "the beginning of the history of salvation that culminates in Christ."<sup>20</sup> This takes us back to the Book of Genesis where we read that God created from nothing. "But it should also be stressed that it is contrary to authentic development to view nature as something more important than the human person. This position leads to attitudes of neo-paganism or a new pantheism — human salvation cannot come from nature alone, understood in a purely naturalistic sense. This having been said, it is also necessary to reject the opposite position, which aims at total technical dominion over nature, because the natural environment is more than raw material to be manipulated at our pleasure; it is a wondrous work of the Creator containing a "grammar" which sets forth ends and criteria for its wise use, not its reckless exploitation. Today much harm is done to development precisely as a result of these distorted notions. Reducing nature merely to a collection of contingent data ends up doing violence to the environment and even encouraging activity that fails to respect human nature itself."<sup>21</sup>

### ***Peace and its cultivation, a Christian's role:***

A point of view that was expressed at the last synod for Africa held that "*peace is the fruit of justice, and justice is respect for and observance of the demands of relationships in which we stand. Reconciliation is the re-establishment of justice, disregarded and infringed upon.*

In this sense, *peace* is directly related to *justice*, as its fruit; and it describes how man stands before and treats God, other men and creation. In Christian thinking/theology, after the "*fall of man*", the character and conduct of man's relationship with God, other men and creation are damaged beyond man's ability to repair them. It takes a free and a loving act (grace) of God to initiate a repair of the relationships and a restoration of *peace*. Again, in Christian theology, it is in and through Jesus that God restores man to *just relationships* (*justifies man*) again, enabling him to live at *peace* with God, with men and with creation.

Thus, after the "*fall*", the experience of *peace* of any kind is **grace**: a free and an unmerited restoration to wholeness and to communion with God, with man and with creation or man's world. Understandably, in the post "*fallen*" state of man, the just treatment of God, of man and

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<sup>19</sup> Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 463.

<sup>20</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, 280.

<sup>21</sup> Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in veritate*, 48.

of creation, which only engenders (whose fruit is) *peace*, is received as God's grace, recognized as such and lived with.

“*Protecting creation*” refers to this “*just treatment*” of creation; and if it only makes for *peace with creation*, then it is also completely *anthropological*. “*Protecting creation*”: “*treating creation justly*”, is completely the responsibility and the work of man; and it is from here too, that one may describe the very many (man-related) challenges to *protecting creation = treating creation justly*.

This, therefore, is a call for a search for solutions based upon a morally based view of all creation. This will come about once we understand the relationship between God and creation and that “The glory of God consists in the realization of this manifestation and communication of his goodness, for which the world was created.”<sup>22</sup>

As Christians, we see our relationship with creation through the redeeming work carried out by Jesus Christ. Our Christian faith tells us that the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ not only reconciled humanity with the Father but all things, “whether on earth or in heaven” (Col 1:19) were reconciled. “And so the readings of the Easter Vigil, the celebration of the new creation in Christ, begin with the creation account.”<sup>23</sup> We look forward to the time of his return when he will come in judgment and establish the new heaven and new earth. “For the cosmos, Revelation affirms the profound common destiny of the material world and man: For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God . . . in hope because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay.... We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. The visible universe, then, is itself destined to be transformed, ‘so that the world itself, restored to its original state, facing no further obstacles, should be at the service of the just,’ sharing their glorification in the risen Jesus Christ.”<sup>24</sup>

A willingness to protect creation as a means toward peace and the building of a peaceful world is a task that is made easier with the knowledge of the goodness and order that exist within creation because of its divine origin in God.<sup>25</sup> As sharers in that goodness and order, it become an imperative that we participate in ensuring that creation is allowed to remain in a state of order and goodness. Creation commands our respect in this regard; and it invites us to be

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 294.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 280.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 1046-1047.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Ibid., 299.

*stewards of creation*. This is a role the creator entrusted to man as his first vocation; and the expectation is that man is “*trustworthy*” (cfr. Heb.3:3-6).

When we realize this duty we also come to know, not only our role as sharers in the work of creation but we realize our responsibility toward present and future generations. “Responsibility for the environment, the common heritage of mankind, extends not only to present needs but also to those of the future (*intergenerational solidarity*). We have inherited from past generations, and we have benefited from the work of our contemporaries: for this reason we have obligations towards all, and we cannot refuse to interest ourselves in those who will come after us, to enlarge the human family. This is a responsibility that present generations have towards those of the future, a responsibility that also concerns individual States and the international Community.”<sup>26</sup> Repeating words written in *Caritas in veritate*, “The Church has a responsibility towards creation and she must assert this responsibility in the public sphere. In so doing, she must defend not only earth, water and air as gifts of creation that belong to everyone. She must above all protect mankind from self-destruction. There is need for what might be called a human ecology, correctly understood. The deterioration of nature is in fact closely connected to the culture that shapes human coexistence: when “human ecology” is respected within society, environmental ecology also benefits.”<sup>27</sup>

If you want to cultivate peace, protect creation. This is our challenge for the New Year. It is an urgent challenge but one that must be undertaken. As sharers in the work of creation, we have an obligation to participate in God’s plan – his providence by which “...God protects and governs all things which he has made, reaching mightily from one end of the earth to the other, and ordering all things well. For all are open and laid bare to his eyes.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *Compendium*, 467.

<sup>27</sup> Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter, *Caritas in veritate*, 51.

<sup>28</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 302.