

Christian Vegetarian Association UK

Working towards a violence-free world

Catholic Declaration Extract from 'The Call of Creation' Catholic Bishops Conference

Introduction.

It has become clear that care for the environment presents a major challenge for the whole of humanity in the 21st Century. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales wishes to add its voice to the many calling for urgent action to protect our earthly home from further destruction. A way of life that disregards and damages God's creation, forces the poor into greater poverty, and threatens the right of future generations to a healthy environment and to their fair share of the earth's wealth and resources, is contrary to the vision of the Gospel.....

Care for the environment is fundamental to the universal good, **since the health and well-being of all life** depends on a healthy environment. The full human development of every human person both now and in future generations cannot be separated from the fate of the earth.....

II. What have we done to the earth?

Damage to the environment affects every part of creation. Hardly a day goes by without some mention of these matters by radio, television and newspapers..... The problems can be grouped into four main areas.

Damage to the earth's life-sustaining mechanisms.

The natural world is made up of many different delicate and intricately interconnected cycles that have nurtured and sustained life for millions of years, giving fertile soil, clean water and a pure atmosphere. Now these life-sustaining mechanisms are breaking down through pollution and abuse.....

Depletion of the world's natural resources.

Our wealth and our way of life depend on the raw materials that are earth's gifts to us. Everything we produce and consume derives from these raw materials. Yet these finite resources are being exploited as if they remained available in infinite quantities.....

The impact on the world's poor.

Environmental destruction and social injustice often go hand-in-hand. Damage to the environment will almost inevitably affect the poor most of all, since poor communities inevitably inhabit the worst and most vulnerable locations. What is more, 80% of the world's resources are commandeered by the richest 20% of the world's population. In other words, we in affluent countries take far more than our fair share of the world's goods.....

The loss of beauty and diversity.

Human activity has always shaped its environment, including many places now

considered areas of great 'natural beauty'. But more recently economic growth, technology, urbanisation and the shift in land-ownership from small farmers to powerful corporations have magnified the scale of this human impact. Grasslands and forests are destroyed for commercial gain, the ***oceans are over-exploited, species become extinct. Our need for beauty and our communion with the other creatures of the earth are also denied.***

III. Understanding the 'signs of the times'.

The environmental crisis has revealed the interdependence of all creation. Whatever we do, whatever choices we make, other people and the earth itself are affected.....As Pope John Paul II put it in his message for World Peace Day in 1990, 'The gravity of the ecological situation reveals how deep is the human moral crisis' (Section 13). To recover health and harmony these broken relationships must be restored and healed. The plight of the earth demonstrates that an individualistic materialism cannot be allowed to drive out responsibility and love, and that care for those in need, and respect for the rights of future generations, are necessary to sustain a proper life for all.....

..... Man is no longer the Creator's "steward" but an autonomous despot, who is finally beginning to understand that he must stop at the edge of the abyss' (Pope John Paul II, 19 January 2001 to a general audience in St Peter's Square). The Pope continued, 'At stake, then, is not only a physical ecology that is concerned to safeguard the habitat of various living beings, but also a human ecology which makes the existence of creatures more dignified, by protecting the fundamental good of life in all its manifestations and by preparing for future generations an environment more in conformity with the Creator's plan'.

IV. Rediscovering moral and scriptural foundations.

Christians see the world through the lens of faith. Our responses to the environmental crisis will therefore draw on our own moral and religious foundations, as well as on other rich traditions of faith.

Creation has value in itself.

We believe that God is the Creator of everything there is and that this creation is good, reflecting God's own goodness (Genesis 1-2). God loves creation for its own sake, and God's love holds everything in existence for its own mysterious purpose (Psalms 104:29-30). Creation has its own relationship with God, in some measure independently of humankind and beyond human understanding: it glorifies and worships God in continuous praise (Psalms 96:12; Isaiah 55:12). Our destructiveness can silence creation's song of praise to God, our care for creation can be a true expression of our own praise. Such a perspective challenges any narrowly economic view that the gifts of creation have value except as a 'factor of production'.

Creation has value because it reveals God.

The Creator's 'eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made' (Romans 1:20). Nature reveals God to us and allows us to experience God's presence.... When we allow creation to be degraded and damaged, therefore, we lose our sense of God's very self.....

Human Beings are dependent but responsible.

Human beings are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), and have the special

gift and challenge of sharing in God's creative activity. We use, and by using we transform, the natural world. **As 'co-creators', then, our acts should reflect God's own love for creation.** We ourselves are part of creation, formed out of the earth, and dependent on the rest of creation for our continued existence: **so we are made aware that caring for creation is part of caring for ourselves (Genesis 2:15). There is a covenant of mutual care and respect that unites God, humankind and every other living creature (Genesis 9).**

Creation reveals human sin.

Our capacity to marvel at the earth, but also to develop and utilise its resources, has greatly enriched our lives. **This human creativity carries with it a profound responsibility.** However, it is also part of Christian faith to recognise that we are sinners: in our present context, this truth means that sin has distorted the human relationship with the natural world: we have disturbed the balance of nature in radical and violent ways...

Sin damages our relationships with God and with one another, the relationships between social groups, and that between humanity and the earth. As the prophets of the Old Testament testify, such sin is reflected in the earth's suffering: 'The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers; the heavens languish together with the earth. The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant' (Isaiah 24:4-5). **'Therefore the land mourns, and all who live in it languish; together with the wild animals and the birds of the air, even the fish of the sea are perishing' (Hosea 4:2-3).**

Creation participates in our redemption.

We live out our relationship with God as dwellers on the earth. Our use of the gifts of creation forms part of that relationship. To love God is, among other things, to give thanks and praise for these gifts, to honour and respect them for themselves, to acknowledge that they are destined by God for all people, and therefore to share the gifts of the earth justly. God constantly calls us back from sin to repentance and conversion. **In thinking of the environment, we can say that the antidote to the sin of exploitative greed is found in the virtue of care and respect.**

Creation in the world to come.

Our present life already participates in the life to come. Jesus says, 'The Kingdom of God is among you' (Luke 17: 21), and we have been given the vision of the new heavens and the new earth as an inspiration for the present as well as a sign of hope for the future. We are partners in God's creative enterprise, called to 'renew the face of the earth' **until there is peace and harmony, sparkling life-giving water, the 'trees of life' that give health and the messianic banquet that can be shared by all the inhabitants of the earth. Then 'the curse of destruction will be abolished' (Revelation 22: 1-3).**

V. Responding to the Cry of Creation.

The cry of creation prompts us all to ask 'What then should we do?' (Luke 3:10). What is needed is 'not merely a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the hardships of many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit ourselves to the common good: that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual because we really are responsible for all.' (Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 1988, Section 38).

Education towards ecological responsibility.

.....*We need an education that helps liberate people from enslavement to a way of life that values consumption, convenience, wealth, status and economic growth above all else, an education that begins to give them the freedom to make different choices.....*

Personal Responsibility and Conversion of Life.

Such a change of attitude calls for a fundamentally new orientation towards the purpose of material possessions. 'It is not wrong to want to live better. What is wrong is a style of life which is presumed to be better when it is directed towards having rather than being and which wants to have more, not in order to be more but in order to spend life in enjoyment as an end in itself.' (Pope John Paul II, Centesimus Annus, Section 37).....All religious traditions encourage simplicity of life, often even a certain austerity. In the Christian tradition, this wisdom derives from the Lord's own profound saying, 'Where your treasure is, there will your heart be too' (Matthew 6: 21). The desire for affluence, for more and more possessions, for almost anything new, can begin to dominate us.

Acting in Partnership: other Churches and Faiths.

Many different groups are to be found where people come together to support and encourage each other towards environmental justice. Amongst these are numerous church-linked programmes and activities. Christians can work together ecumenically at parish level and nationally..... Christians can also give common witness to the value and goodness of creation with other faiths, not least Judaism and Islam which share our belief in God, the loving Creator of all that is.

Acting in solidarity.

Individual choices can seem insignificant when faced with such global challenges. But multiplied individual actions can indeed make a real difference.

VI. Conclusion.

Christians, particularly perhaps Catholic Christians, are reminded of the precious gifts of creation at each Eucharistic celebration. In the ancient prayer over the gifts of bread and wine we praise God our Creator, and remember that these material goods are given to us by God and are fashioned through the co-operation of Creator and creature: so our own daily living is to reflect our gratitude for the gifts that have been given to us. Again, in the Eucharist we join in the self-giving, the sacrifice, of Christ himself, and in this sense the offering of our own lives - time, convenience, money - for the good of others can itself be Eucharistic, **a 'sacrifice' for the good of others. In the Eucharist we, the priestly people, the Church, are empowered to transform and use what we have been given. This act of transformation is a sacred act. But it is for all, to nourish all, for the life and salvation of all.**

The complete declaration can be read on www.catholic-ew.org.uk
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