

Dominion Over All Things – Care for God’s Creation

The Catholic Church has much to say about the environment and our responsibility in regard to it.

A. Theological Foundation

① God acts through creation to reveal His divine presence to us.

Creation teaches us about God. An idea that has been meditated on and preached on from the early Church Fathers!

Gen 9:8-17: Covenant with Noah and all of creation.

Ps 8:4-5: Looking at the order of creation, how much more does God care for man!

Seeing creation as God’s gift to humanity helps us understand our vocation and worth as human beings. With the Psalmist, we can exclaim with wonder: *“When I look at your heavens, the work of your hands, the moon and the stars which you have established; what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?”* (Ps 8:4-5). Contemplating the beauty of creation inspires us to recognize the love of the Creator, that Love which “moves the sun and the other stars”. (Pope Benedict XVI, Message for World Day of Peace, 2010, # 2) There exists a certain reciprocity: as we care for creation, we realize that God, through creation, cares for us. (Pope Benedict XVI, Message for World Day of Peace, 2010, # 13)

“St. John of Damascus said, *“I do not worship matter. I worship the Creator of matter, who became matter for my sake, who willed to take his abode in matter; who worked out my salvation through matter. ...I honor it, but not as God. Because of this I salute all remaining matter with reverence because God has filled it with his grace and power.”*

② Man protects creation and shares in God’s creative acts.

“The Book of Genesis, in its very first pages, points to the wise design of the cosmos: it comes forth from God’s mind and finds its culmination in man and woman, made in the image and likeness of the Creator to “fill the earth” and to “have dominion over” it as “stewards” of God himself (cf. Gen 1:28). . . . But the true meaning of God’s original command, as the Book of Genesis clearly shows, was not a simple conferral of authority, but rather a summons to responsibility. . . Biblical Revelation made us see that nature is a gift of the Creator, who gave it an inbuilt order and enabled man to draw from it the principles needed to “till it and keep it” (cf. Gen. 2:15). Everything that exists belongs to God, who has entrusted it to man, albeit not for his arbitrary use.” (Pope Benedict XVI, Message for World Day of Peace, 2010, # 6)

Gen 2:15 – God entrust care of creation to Adam & Eve

“The Church has a responsibility towards creation, and she considers it her duty to exercise that responsibility in public life, in order to protect earth, water and air as gifts of God the Creator meant for everyone, and above all to save mankind from the danger of self-destruction.” (Pope Benedict XVI, Message for World Day of Peace, 2010, # 12)

Social Concerns of the Church – The dominion granted to man by the Creator is not an absolute power, nor can one speak of a freedom to ‘use and misuse’, or to dispose of things as one pleases. The limitations imposed from the beginning by the Creator himself...shows clearly enough that, when it comes to the natural world, we are subject not only to biological

laws but also to moral ones, which cannot be violated with ‘impunity’. (Pope John Paul II 1987)

“A greater sense of intergenerational solidarity is urgently needed. Future generations cannot be saddled with the cost of our use of common environmental resources. ‘We have inherited from past generations, and we have benefited from the work of our contemporaries; for this reason we have obligations towards all . . . This is a responsibility that present generations have towards those of the future, a responsibility that also concerns individual States and the international community’.” (Pope Benedict XVI, Message for World Day of Peace, 2010, # 8)

③ God is the center of everything, not man.

Pope John Paul II warned in his message for the 1990 World Day of Peace that
“consumerism and instant gratification are the root causes of our ecological predicament.”

Pope Benedict XVI at World youth day in 2008 declared that sustainable development for future generations is of vital importance and reminded us of the Catholic Social Teaching on Solidarity and the respect of basic human rights (right to life, food, health, development).

“It is becoming more and more evident that the issue of environmental degradation challenges us to examine our life-style and the prevailing models of consumption and production, which are often unsustainable from a social, environmental and even economic point of view. We can no longer do without a real change of outlook which will result in new 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’.” (Pope Benedict XVI, Message for World Day of Peace, 2010, # 11)

B. Current Environmental Issues and their Potential Impacts

Here is a list of some environmental issues due to human activities:

Climate Change: change in weather patterns, temperature raise, threatened ecosystems, raise of the sea level

Energy: depletion of non-renewable resources, pollution (see the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico)

Waste: toxic and non-degradable material, pollution, health problems

Water: depletion of the global reserves of drinkable water, desertification, pollution, water-related diseases

Food and agriculture: degradation of arable lands, desertification, invasive species

C. What is Being Done

- In the US, the Environment Protection Agency has for mission to protect human health and to safeguard the natural environment -- air, water and land -- upon which life depends. Their priorities are:

- Taking action on climate change

- Improving air quality

- Assuring the safety of chemicals

- Cleaning up our communities

- Protecting America's waters

Expanding the conversation on environmentalism and working for environmental justice
Building strong state and tribal partnerships

(www.epa.gov)

- The cities of College Station and Bryan have programs for recycling and disposal of hazardous house hold waste, and tips on how to go green. Visit www.cstx.gov/index.aspx?page=3186 and www.bryantx.gov/departments/?name=environmental
- Since 1993 the *Environmental Justice Program* (EJP) from the US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) calls Catholics to a deeper respect for God's creation and engages parishes in activities that deal with environmental problems, particularly as they affect the poor. (www.usccb.org/sdwp/ejp/)
- The *Catholic Coalition on Climate Change* was launched in 2006 to help the USCCB and the Catholic community address the moral issues of climate change and provide resources for education and action ideas. (www.catholicsandclimatechange.org)

D. Actions we can and should take:

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- 1) Reduce: Turn down the thermostat so that it doesn't have to work so hard. Turn off the lights. Take a shorter shower. Support companies that are reducing packaging (Ozarka and other water bottles).
- 2) Reuse: Donate gently used clothing and other items to the St. Vincent de Paul Store. (and help support those in need in our community.) Larger items can go to the Habitat Resale store.
- 3) Recycle

- **ADVOCACY**: There have been many studies that link poverty to environmental injustice, speak up for them and advocate for other issues of importance to the environment. For example, this year the Diocese of Austin spoke up when the city of Austin wanted to create a plan for increasing the 'green' energy for the city bringing up the fact that the cost of the project will further harm the poor (they would have been affected the most drastically). The diocese became the "social justice conscience" for a group of Austin's largest energy users. Due to the efforts of many, an amendment was added to the plan that suspends its implementation until cost controls are put in place. In addition, major purchases of energy will have to go through review process. No one disputes that energy costs will go up; however, the diocese was encouraged that their requests for considerations on behalf of the poor and least among us were heard and acted upon.
- **Support community efforts** helping victims of environmental disasters, like Catholic Charities in the Gulf of Mexico: in New Orleans, www.ccano.org; in Houma-Thibodaux, www.htdiocese.org; in Biloxi: www.biloxidiocese.org.

Contribute to the Capital Campaign for Human Development, a second collection that is taken up once a year at St. Mary's.

Support Catholic Relief Services. They go into areas and help the people there learn techniques to improve their subsistence. (www.crs.org)

“When ‘human ecology’ is respected within society, environmental ecology also benefits”. . . .
The book of nature is one and indivisible; it includes not only the environment but also individual, family and social ethics. Our duties towards the environment flow from our duties towards the person, considered both individually and in relation to others.
(Pope Benedict XVI, Message for World Day of Peace, 2010, # 11)

Prayers

Daniel 3:57-88, 56

Bless the Lord, all you works of the Lord. **Praise and exalt him above all forever.**

Angels of the Lord, **bless the Lord.**

You heavens, **bless the Lord.**

All you waters above the heavens, **bless the Lord.**

All you hosts of the Lord, **bless the Lord.**

Sun and moon, **bless the Lord.**

Stars of heaven, **bless the Lord.**

Every shower and dew, **bless the Lord.**

All you winds, **bless the Lord.**

Fire and heat, **bless the Lord.**

Cold and chill, **bless the Lord.**

Dew and rain, **bless the Lord.**

Frost and chill. **bless the Lord.**

Ice and snow, **bless the Lord.**

Nights and days, **bless the Lord.**

Light and darkness, **bless the Lord.**

Lightnings and clouds, **bless the Lord.**

Let the earth bless the Lord. **Praise and exalt him above all forever.**

Mountains and hills, **bless the Lord.**

Everything growing from the earth, **bless the Lord.**

You springs, **bless the Lord.**

Seas and rivers, **bless the Lord.**

You dolphins and all water creatures, **bless the Lord.**

All you birds of the air, **bless the Lord.**

All you beasts, wild and tame, **bless the Lord.**

You sons of men, **bless the Lord.**

O Israel, bless the Lord. **Praise and exalt him above all forever.**

Priests of the Lord, **bless the Lord.**

Servants of the Lord, **bless the Lord.**

Spirits and souls of the just, **bless the Lord.**

Holy men of humble heart, **bless the Lord.**

Hananiah, Azariah, Mishael, **bless the Lord. Praise and exalt him above all forever.**

Blessed are you, Lord, in the firmament of heaven. **Praiseworthy and glorious and exalted above all forever**

You, O God, Majestic Creator, are the origin of all life.

Nothing can exclude itself from your creative influence.

You are wonderful in your words and in your sovereignty.

Amazed, I contemplate the perfection of the world you created for human beings.

You are unmatched in your power and in your goodness.

O Lord, you direct like a conductor the orchestration of a storm, and you shape like a sculptor the petals of a flower.

You are prodigious in your majesty and in your wisdom

Lord you have fashioned human beings to accept the challenges of nature and to be your voice in creation.

O Lord and King, Majestic Creator, you have made your mystery transparent in the world you have created.

I worship you in your creation and in your providence. Amen.