

SEMINAR

**CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING
AND THE ENVIRONMENT**



Prepared by Social Action Office – CLRIQ

March 2002

Catholic Social Teaching and the Environment

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SUGGESTED SEMINAR FORMAT

This seminar can be conducted in different ways depending on the time available. One option would be to use a full day, going into each section as fully as possible, using different strategies with the group. If only a shorter time was available, certain sections could be the focus of the time. In all of this a determining factor would be whether the group had any prior knowledge of Catholic Social Teaching (CST).

The seminar is divided into distinct sections:

- Sections 1 and 2 form the basic unit outlining what is known as Catholic Social Teaching;
- Sections 3, 4 and 5 constitute the material for working with Catholic Social Teaching and the Environment.

Section 1: A brief introduction to the history of the evolution of Catholic Social Teaching from 1891 to 1991 with the main emphasis being on papal and synod documents and linking this evolution with major contemporary and historical events

Section 2: The key principles of Catholic Social Teaching and a brief exploration of what are in the main papal documents

Section 3: Exploring the further dimension of the place of the environment within Catholic Social Teaching.

Section 4: The praxis – exploring how these teachings/statements inform taking action for justice.

Section 5: Conclusion – identifying resources, books and websites for ongoing use. (Use of IT if possible for this)

The seminar would begin and end with a ritual which is appropriate to the group involved.

INTRODUCTION

Catholic Social Teaching (CST) has been referred to as the Catholic Church's 'best kept secret'! It is Church teaching that is rarely preached about, rarely written about and rarely spoken about in Church circles. Consequently, it rarely informs decision-making and action – at least explicitly. This Seminar is an attempt to provide information, an impetus to reclaim this tradition and to allow it to become a benchmark for the living out of faith in today's world.

The first part of this seminar offers an historical overview of Catholic Social Teaching in general.

This is followed by an attempt to address the place of the environment within Catholic Social Teaching.

SECTION 1

Catholic Social Teaching

1.1 Historical Overview

In 1891, Pope Leo XIII released his encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (On the Condition of Labour). This was the first of the great social encyclicals of the Catholic Church. It was written in an era of immense social change in Europe, distinguished by the awakening of democracy and the popular appeal of communism to the working class. It was an era of far-reaching social transformation and it called forth a response from the Pope.

Essentially, Leo XIII had two concerns. Firstly, he opposed the atheistic philosophy of communism but recognised its appeal to workers. Communism offered workers a socio-economic and political alternative to the self-interested alliance between aristocratic privilege and capital-industrial interests. In short, it was an influential part of a growing movement for political and economic equality. This was a movement the Church could not ignore. Secondly, he took issue with what he saw as the excesses of liberal-capitalist development in Europe. Central to these excesses was the exploitation and dire poverty of workers and the concomitant concentration of privilege and wealth in the hands of a few. Seeing this situation, he argued for:

- the recognition of human dignity;
- the protection of basic economic and political rights, including the right to a just wage and to organise associations or unions to defend just claims;
- the right to private property;
- the rights of labour over capital;
- the just organisations of society for the common good.

In short, Leo rejected communism and the philosophy on which it was based. At the same time, he did not ignore the basis of its appeal to workers and condemned the exploitative nature of the liberal-capitalist alternative.

Leo's positive affirmations about the political implications of human dignity are summarized in a phrase from the 1891 encyclical Rerum Novarum which has been cited many times in the later documents of the tradition: 'Man (sic) precedes the State'. The worth of human beings, in other words, is the standard by which political and legal institutions are to be evaluated.

David Hollenbach, *Claims in Conflict*, 1979 p 47

Rerum Novarum was a watershed in the life of the modern Church because it situated the church in the social, political and economic ferment of the late nineteenth century and it began a tradition of engagement with the social order, which slowly took shape over the next century. [OHT 1 – Catholic Social Teaching 1891-1991] The OHT provides a time-line showing the historical development of CST over one hundred years.

It is noteworthy that forty years lapsed before the writing of a second social encyclical, *Quadragesimo Anno* (The Reconstruction of the Social Order). It is also noteworthy that the last thirty years have seen rapid development in this aspect of the church's life.

Essentially the development of the CST has been organic, building upon, developing and adding to the central themes of Leo's encyclical. The anniversary of this first social encyclical has, since 1961, become an occasion for the release of another social encyclical. This has followed consistently in all the decades since *Mater et Magistra* (Mother and Teacher).

Two observations are relevant here. Firstly, this teaching highlights the Church's engagement with the big socio-economic and political issues since 1891 and, it is evident from the time-line, that the papacy of Pope John XXIII and Vatican II gave significant impetus to this dynamic in the life of the Church. Secondly, the time-line only shows the major social encyclicals and council documents which have come from the Vatican. While these are especially significant for the worldwide Church, they have inspired and been inspired by numerous other documents that have grown out of and been addressed to specific faith communities. Some examples are:

- the Australian Bishops' Conference, *Common Wealth for the Common Good*;
- the Medellin and Puebla documents from the Latin American Church;
- the American Bishops' Conference, *Economic Justice for All*; and
- the African Bishops' Conference, *Justice and Evangelisation in Africa*.

While recognising the significant contribution of local Bishops' conferences to CST, what follows is mainly focused on the encyclicals and documents originating from Rome.

It is not accidental that the development of CST paralleled the modern development of Catholic biblical scholarship and interpretation. Encouraged by Pius XII encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (Inspired by the Divine Spirit) in 1943 and further endorsed by the Vatican II document *Dei Verbum* (The Word of God), Catholics in the later half of the twentieth century have re-claimed a biblical heritage that placed great emphasis on the prophetic tradition of justice and the 'preferential' place of the poor in the kingdom of God. This has influenced CST significantly.

So, the development of CST in the last one hundred years has been significant in the life of the Church. Each of the social encyclicals reflects the issues of the time in which it was written and the personality of the author. This being said, what does this tradition of CST teach us and call us to?

[Handout 1 – Catholic Social Teaching 1891-1991]

1.2 The Content of Catholic Social Teaching

Rerum Novarum opened the Church up to consideration of the socio-economic, political and cultural forces that were shaping and continue to shape the modern world. In general, the encyclicals have taken issue with many facets of the contemporary world, which are deemed to violate the essential dignity of the human person and trample upon justice and the common good of the global community.

[OHT 2 – Summary of the Encyclicals and Documents] The OHT provides a brief summary of each of the papal encyclicals, synod documents and letters which constitute the official Roman CST canon, highlighting the distinctive issues each has added to the evolving tradition. Some examples:

- Leo XIII was concerned for the plight of the working class in late nineteenth century Europe and for the role of government;
- Pius XI proposed the principle of subsidiarity as the basis for social organisation;
- John XXIII was concerned with the conditions for world peace, confronting the arms race, international relations, racism and development aid;
- Paul VI was concerned with development and justice, trade issues, structural injustice, development aid and working for justice;
- John Paul II's encyclicals have encompassed concern with the changing nature of work and workers' conditions, the North-South gap, the option for the poor, the universal destination of the world's goods and the structures of sin.

CST encompasses many global concerns but it has always had a particular concern with the situation of the poor and the structural causes that create the conditions of poverty and marginalisation. Further, CST has developed in an organic way, with each new encyclical and document building upon the tradition and adding new dimensions to it.

It is important to acknowledge that CST does not purport to offer a 'blueprint' for an ideal type of society. Rather, CST proposes principles aimed at creating 'right' social, economic and political relationships and the construction of social structures and institutions based on justice and respect for human dignity. Inherent in CST is the belief that the application of these principles to the structures and institutions of society, both nationally and globally, will enhance human dignity, overcome poverty and promote and ensure social justice.

The key principles, which emerged and have been developed in over one hundred years of CST centre on:

- Human dignity
- The common good
- The principle of solidarity
- The principle of subsidiarity
- The purpose of the social order
- The purpose of government
- The principle of participation
- The universal purpose of goods
- The option for the poor.

SECTION 2

2.1 Key Principles of Catholic Social Teaching Expanded

[OHT 3 – Key Principles of Catholic Social Teaching]

1. Human Dignity

Human beings are created in the image of God and, therefore, are endowed with dignity. This inherent dignity carries with it certain basic rights and responsibilities, which are exercised within a social framework.

2. The Common Good

While the dignity of the human person is affirmed, individuals live in common with others and the rights of individuals must be balanced with the wider common good of all. The rights and needs of others must be always respected.

3. The Principle of Solidarity

Human beings are social by nature and do not exist merely as individuals. When considering the human community it must be remembered that it consists of individuals and social elements.

4. The Principle of Subsidiarity

This principle recognises that society is based on collectives or communities of people ranging from small groups or families right through to national and international institutions. As a rule of social organisation, this principle affirms that a higher-level community should not interfere in the life of a community at a lower level of social organisation.

5. The Purpose of the Social Order

The social order must uphold the dignity of the human person.

6. The Purpose of Government

The purpose of government is the promotion of the common good. Governments are required to actively participate in society to promote and ensure social justice and equity.

7. The Principle of Participation

Individuals and groups must be enabled to participate in society.

8. The Universal Purpose of Goods

The world's goods are meant for all. Although the Church upholds the right to private property this is subordinate to the right to common use and the overall common good. There is a social mortgage on private property.

9. The Option for the Poor

This refers to seeing the world through the eyes of the poor and standing with the poor in solidarity. This should lead to action for justice with and on behalf of those who are poor and marginalised.

[Handout 2 – Key Principles of Catholic Social Teaching]

2.2 Summary of the Main Encyclicals and Documents

[OHT 2 again – Summary of the Encyclicals and Documents]

Rerum Novarum: On the Condition of Labour (Leo XIII, 1891)

- Lays out the rights and responsibilities of capital and labour;
- Describes the role of Government in a just society;
- Condemns atheistic communism;
- Upholds the right to private property.

Quadragesimo Anno: On Reconstructing the Social Order (Pius XI, 1931)

Condemns the effects of greed and concentrated political and economic power and proposes that social organisation be based on the principle of subsidiarity.

Mater et Magistra: Mother and Teacher (John XXIII, 1961)

- Identifies the widening gap between the rich and poor nations as a global concern of justice;
- Raises concerns about the arms race;
- Calls upon Christians to work for a more just world.

Pacem in Terris: Peace on Earth (John XXIII, 1963)

- Focus on human rights as the basis for peace;
- Calls for disarmament;
- Stating the need for a worldwide institution to promote and safeguard the universal common good.

Gaudium et Spes: The Church in the Modern World (Vatican Council document, 1965)

- Clear recognition that the Church is immersed in the modern world;
- Condemns poverty;
- Warns about the threat of nuclear war;
- Christians must work to build structures that uphold justice and peace.

Populorum Progressio: On the Development of Peoples (Paul VI, 1967)

- Focus on human development – ‘development is the new name for peace’;
- Condemns the situation that gives rise to global poverty and inequality;
- Calls for new international organisations and agreements that promote justice and peace.

Octogesima Adveniens: An Apostolic Letter: A Call to Action (Paul VI, 1971)

Calls for political action for economic justice;
Develops the role of individual local churches in responding to unjust situations and acting for justice.

Justice in the World (Synod of Bishops, 1971)

States that “action for justice” is a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel.

Evangelii Nuntiandi: Evangelisation in the Modern World (Paul VI, 1975)

Links the work of doing justice with evangelisation;
The Gospel is about liberation from all oppressive structures;
Respect for cultures.

Laborum Exercens: On Human Work (John Paul II, 1981)

Affirms the dignity of work and the dignity of the worker;
Affirms the rights of labour;
Calls for workplace justice.

Sollicitudo Rei Socialis: The Social Concerns of the Church (John Paul II, 1987)

Includes the “option for the poor” as a central tenet of Church teaching;
Also develops the notions of ‘solidarity’, the ‘structures of sin’ and ‘the social mortgage on property’;
Suggests that the resources used for the arms race be dedicated to the alleviation of human misery;
Nature must be considered in development.

Peace with God the Creator, Peace with Creation – Pastoral Letter (John Paul II, 1990)

The ecological crisis is a moral crisis facing humanity;
Respect for nature and ecological responsibility is a key tenet of faith;
The integrity of creation must be upheld;
Ecological education to nurture a new global solidarity that takes account of nature.

Centesimus Annus: One Hundred Years (John Paul II, 1991)

Reaffirms the principles of Catholic Social Teaching over one hundred years;
Celebrates *Rerum Novarum*;
Identifies the failures of both socialist and market economies.

(This Summary has been adapted and developed from NETWORK 1998,
Shaping a New World, pp 5-11)

[Handout 3 – Summary of the Encyclicals and Documents]

2.3 The Ongoing Development of Catholic Social Teaching

What is now known as Catholic Social Teaching evolved in the period since 1891. It developed organically. Each document drew upon and affirmed what had preceded it but also added to and developed the teaching. Given this, it is possible to point to consistent values and principles within this tradition.

Notwithstanding this and the importance of CST to the life of the contemporary Catholic Church, there are some matters, which require further development and better inclusion in this canon of teaching. These include:

- the role and status of women in society and in the Church has not been addressed adequately and remains a significant limitation of CST;
- an encyclical on the environment is overdue even though some move has been made in this direction by the current Pope; the main focus of CST has been anthropocentric;
- reflecting the European base of the Catholic Church, CST tends to be euro-centric in its focus. For example, in recent times CST has made reference to the significance of the fall of communism in Eastern Europe but little reference has been made to the demise of apartheid in South Africa; arguably, the release from prison of Nelson Mandela in 1990 was as significant for colonised people in Africa as the destruction of the Berlin Wall was for Europeans!

As it has evolved since 1891, it is hoped that this evolution will continue into this new century and continue to push the boundaries of faith to incorporate the big issues of the future.

SECTION 3

Catholic Social Teaching and the Environment

In recent decades, within the Church and especially in statements from the recent Popes, there has been much theological and scriptural reflection on the environment. Much of this has been applied to the way humankind lives on the Earth and the need for conversion of life in the face of the widespread evidence of great environmental degradation. In the light of this crisis, highlighted by so many statements emanating from the Vatican, it is hoped that there will soon be proclaimed an authoritative Papal document on the environment. Aligned with this is the emergence, in recent times (and after the precedents set in prior centuries), of a spirituality that can be called “ecological”. However, the environment can’t be considered in isolation. Earlier encyclicals, although often named for one issue, e.g. the rights of the worker in *Rerum Novarum*, also placed that issue in the social context of the time.

When we think of the total Earth community we realise that everything is inter-related. Recognition of environmental issues brings with it an understanding that other areas of concern must be part of the discussion. It is only in this holistic way that solutions to the environmental problems of the twenty-first century can be addressed.

Some examples of issues that interconnect within the focus of the environment are:

- Human population
- Land ownership
- Patents
- Corporatisation
- Refugees
- Health.

The Millennium Institute offers an historical overview of the last 600 years (1600-2200) – a time span which covers the period during which human activity has had and will continue to have the greatest impact on Earth. Although 2200 seems a long way off, we can understand the dangers to the Earth as we acknowledge the rapidly changing philosophical ideas, historic events and scientific discoveries which led to the rapid development of technology. All these have the ability to change dramatically how we live on this planet.

[OHT 4 – Philosophical ideas, historic events, and scientific discoveries during the period 1600 to present]

This descriptor gives information only to the late 1990s. However, it does introduce the idea that all decisions should be made from the standpoint of their impact on the seventh generation into the future. This seventh generation does not mean only human beings, but all members of the Earth community. From our own life experience what events could be added for the last five years (1997 – present)? Some examples – globalisation, refugees, climate change, terrorism, others?

There are also some other important criteria to keep in mind:

- How far into the future do our major institutions think?
- Governments work around the tenure of elected officials – how long? Perhaps a decade. And then to whom are they responsible? To what extent can they lead without fear of losing the next election?

- What of business institutions? If they are profit-driven then their policies are geared to what will increase the profit margin for the shareholders.
- What are some other examples? (Universities, the media, others)

Short-term policies result when individuals and/or institutions are driven by present needs, survival, profit or re-election. Only the faith traditions of the world have an outlook of generations. This was demonstrated in 1993 when the **Parliament of World Religions** issued a *Global Ethic*.

[Handout 4 – Global Ethic 1993]

Sean McDonagh, in *The Greening of the Church*, has a chapter devoted to *The Environment in the Modern Catholic Church* in which he claims that this is one area where the Church has been slow to recognise the gravity of the situation facing the global community and in spite of the present Pope's recent statements it is fair to say that the Church has still to authoritatively address the present crisis (p 175ff).

So, although there has been no encyclical written specifically for the environment, many directives around this issue have been emanating within other documents, statements, etc. from the Vatican for many years. However, what has been promulgated in speeches, messages, letters, etc. has been anthropocentric (the natural creation is there for the use of 'mankind') and couched in exclusive language. In recent years several Bishops' conferences have also issued messages which include some reference to this agenda:

- *At Home in the Web of Life: A Pastoral Message on Sustainable Communities* (December 15, 1995) – Catholic Bishops of Appalachia;
- *Pastoral Statement on the Environmental Crisis* (September 5, 1999) – Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference;
- *A Consistent Ethic of Life* (April 17, 1997) – New Zealand Catholic Conference;
- *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence & the Common Good* (June 15, 2001) – USA Bishops.

The Australian Bishops in their 2001 Social Justice Sunday Statement, *A Just and Peaceful Land – Rural and Regional Australia in 2001*, certainly raised some environmental/ecological issues within the broader discussion around rural and regional Australia. The Australian Bishops' Conference is in the process (2001-2002) of preparing a statement on environmental issues for release on Social Justice Sunday in 2002.

Extensive work has been done by various Catholic conservation/environment/justice groups to extract from Catholic leaders' writings, etc. statements about the environment/creation from the earliest times of the Church until now. There are certainly paragraphs/sentences regarding the environment which can be found in the documents of the Council of Vatican II and the encyclicals, as well as in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. John XXIII in 1963 in his encyclical *Pacem in Terris* gave a clear ideal in relation to the total Earth community.

[OHT 5 – Pope John XXIII *Peace on Earth*]

Pope John XXIII *Peace on Earth*:

“Peace on Earth, which all people of every era have most eagerly yearned for, can be firmly established only if the order laid down by God can be dutifully observed. The progress of learning and the inventions of technology clearly show that, both in living

things and in the forces of nature, an astonishing order reigns, and they also bear witness to the greatness of humankind, who can understand that order and create suitable instruments to harness those forces of nature and use them to their benefit.

But the progress of science and the inventions of technology show above all the infinite greatness of God Who created the universe and humankind. He created all things out of nothing, pouring into them the abundance of His wisdom and goodness, so that the holy psalmist praises God in these words: ‘O Lord our master, the majesty of thy name fills all the Earth’ (Psalm 8:1). Elsewhere he says: ‘What diversity, Lord, in thy creatures! What wisdom has designed them all!’ (Psalm 104:24). God also created humankind in His own image and likeness, endowed them with intelligence and freedom, and made them lord of creation, as the same psalmist declares in the words: ‘You have made them a little lower than the angels, and crowned them with glory and honor. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet.’ (Psalm 8:5-6).

How strongly does the turmoil of individuals and peoples contrast with the perfect order of the universe! It is as if the relationships which bind them together could be controlled only by force. But the Creator of the world has imprinted in humankind’s heart an order which their conscience reveals to them and enjoins them to obey: ‘This shows that the obligations of the law are written in their hearts; their conscience utters its own testimony’ (Romans 2:15). And how could it be otherwise? For whatever God has made shows forth His infinite wisdom, and it is manifested more clearly in the things which have greater perfection (cf. Psalm 18:8-11).”

-- *Pacem In Terris*, Encyclical Letter of Pope John XXIII On Establishing Universal Peace in Truth, Justice, Charity, and Liberty, 1963

Indeed the Pope embraces the whole cosmos! This cosmic emphasis was repeated by John Paul II in 1988 in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* with its admonition to take into account the nature of each being, etc.

[OHT 6 – Quote from *On Social Concern*]

“One must take into account the nature of each being and of its mutual connection in an ordered system, which is precisely the ‘Cosmos’.”

-- *On Social Concern (Sollicitudo Rei Socialis)* 1988, No. 34

[OHT 7 – Quotes from Pope Paul VI]

There are also examples from speeches given by Pope Paul VI in 1969: *The image of the creator must shine forth ever more clearly, not only in his creature man, but in all of his creation in nature* (to the Council of the World Wildlife Fund). In 1970, in his address to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, Paul VI is conscious that ‘man’ has dominated the natural world: “*It took millennia for man to learn to dominate, to subdue the Earth, according to the inspired word of the first book of the bible. The hour has now come for him to dominate his domination; this essential undertaking requires no less courage and dauntlessness than the conquest of nature itself.*” (Italics SAO). From this we can see that as early as 1970 there was recognition that change was necessary.

It is worth noting here that the Pontifical Academy of Science (Rome) has been involved with environmental studies for many years. A recent example of this involvement is the Study Week

held in 1987 (November 2-7). The academy held this Study Week on *A Modern Approach to the Protection of the Environment*. “The purpose of the meeting was to examine damage to the natural environment caused primarily by the undisciplined activities of humans” (p 15 – Conclusions). Specific needs were recognised and appropriate recommendations were made. One of the needs recognised was Biological Diversity – *we therefore recommend the conservation of all species and their respective habitats as an urgent issue for the international community, and also the provision by that same community of the financial resources necessary to undertake such a task* (p 19 – Conclusions).

This particular Study Week and another in May 1990 on “Man and His Environment – Tropical Forests and the Conservation of Species” occurred during the time of the present Pope and we can now highlight some important statements of John Paul II. During his pontificate there has been much written from a scriptural or theological stance, e.g. the 2001 July 15 Angelus Address given in the Italian Alps.

[OHT 8 – Angelus Address 15 July 2001]

“Pope John Paul II invited some 4,000 people gathered in the rain to praise God and see the imprint of His love in the beauty of creation. He called the beauty of creation the first book that God has entrusted to the mind and heart of man. The beauty of nature impels the soul to recall God’s goodness, (the Pope) told the crowd that gathered to pray the angelus with him.”

Most significantly, signposts for ecological health were flagged by Pope John Paul II in his January 1, 1990 World Day of Peace message. This message carried the title *The Ecological Crisis – A Common Responsibility – Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all of Creation!* This document, if taken seriously by the Catholic Community, could effect enormous change. A change of heart and a subsequent change of lifestyle is strongly advocated. After a strong introduction the message highlights the need to ‘understand better the relationship between human activity and the whole of creation’.

[OHT 9 – The Ecological Crisis – A Common Responsibility – Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all of Creation!]

In our day 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. The sense of precariousness and insecurity that such a situation engenders is a seedbed for collective selfishness, disregard for others and dishonesty.

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. The public in general as well as political leaders are concerned about this problem, and experts from a wide range of disciplines are studying its causes. Moreover, a new ecological awareness is beginning to emerge which, rather than being downplayed, ought to be encouraged to develop into concrete programs and initiatives.

*Introduction to the Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II
for the celebration of the World Day of Peace, January 1, 1990*

John Paul II recognised that the Earth is suffering. Importantly he insists that the ecological crisis constitutes a moral issue.

The ecological crisis is a moral issue... Respect for life and for the dignity of the human person extends also to the rest of creation... we cannot interfere in one area of the ecosystem without paying due attention both to the consequences of such interference in other areas and to the well-being of future generations.

-- Pope John Paul II, 1990

He calls for:

1. a more discriminate application of advances in science and technology;
2. the painful realisation that we cannot interfere in one area of the ecosystem without paying due attention both to the consequences of such interference in other areas and to the well-being of future generations;
3. the entire human community – individuals, States and international bodies – (to) take seriously the responsibility that is theirs (in this context the Pope refers to greenhouse gases and the depletion of the ozone layer);
4. attention to be paid to the moral implications underlying the ecological problem – (the) lack of respect for life (that) is evident in many patterns of environmental pollution; viz.
 - a. production over workers
 - b. destruction, by reckless exploitation of natural resources, of delicate ecological balance
 - c. dangers inherent in biological research
 - d. a more internationally coordinated approach to the management of Earth's goods
 - e. implementation of the ideal of a right for all to a safe environment which must be included in an updated Charter of Human Rights
 - f. a direct addressing of the structural forms of poverty existing throughout the world
 - g. the awareness of the danger any war poses for the total Earth community
 - h. An examination of our lifestyles
 - i. education in ecological responsibility
 - j. the appreciation of the aesthetic value of creation
 - k. an acceptance of our common responsibility in relation to the ecological crisis.

[Handout 6 – What is called for]

These principles can consistently be found in many places throughout Pope John Paul II's later speeches and messages. As recently as January 17, 2001 at a General Audience he encouraged and supported 'the ecological conversion which in recent decades has made humanity more sensitive to the catastrophe to which it has been heading'.

[OHT 11 – General Audience 17 January 2001]

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday 17 January 2001

God made man the steward of creation

1. In the hymn of praise proclaimed a few moments ago (Ps 148:1-5), the Psalmist summons all creatures, calling them by name. Angels, sun, moon, stars and heavens appear on high; twenty-two things move upon the Earth, as many as the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, in order to give an impression of fullness and totality. The believer, in a sense, is "the shepherd of being", that is, the one who leads all beings to God, inviting

them to sing an “alleluia” of praise. The Psalm brings us into a sort of cosmic church, whose apse is the heavens and whose aisles are the regions of the world, in which the choir of God's creatures sings his praise.

On the one hand, this vision might represent a lost paradise and, on the other, the promised paradise. Not without reason, the horizon of a paradisaal universe, which Genesis (ch 2) put at the very origins of the world, is placed by Isaiah (ch 11) and the Book of Revelation (ch 21-22) at the end of history. Thus we see that man's harmony with his fellow beings, with creation and with God is the plan followed by the Creator. This plan was and is continually upset by human sin, which is inspired by an alternative plan depicted in the same Book of Genesis (ch 3-11), which describes man's progressive conflictual tension with God, with his fellow human beings and even with nature.

2. The contrast between the two plans emerges clearly in the vocation to which humanity is called, according to the Bible, and in the consequences resulting from its infidelity to this call. The human creature receives a mission to govern creation in order to make all its potential shine. It is a delegation granted at the very origins of creation, when man and woman, who are the “image of God” (Gen 1:27), receive the order to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the Earth and subdue it, and to have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air and every living thing that moves upon the Earth (cf. Gen 1:28). St Gregory of Nyssa, one of the three great Cappadocian Fathers, commented: “God made man capable of carrying out his role as king of the Earth... Man was created in the image of the One who governs the universe. Everything demonstrates that from the beginning his nature was marked by royalty... He is the living image who participates by his dignity in the perfection of the divine archetype” (*De Hominis Opificio*, 4:PG 44, 136).

3. Man's lordship, however, is not “absolute, but ministerial: it is a real reflection of the unique and infinite lordship of God. Hence man must exercise it with wisdom and love, sharing in the boundless wisdom and love of God” (*Evangelium vitae*, no 52). In biblical language “naming” the creatures (cf. Gen 2:19-20) is the sign of this mission of knowing and transforming created reality. It is not the mission of an absolute and unquestionable master, but of a steward of God's kingdom who is called to continue the Creator's work, a work of life and peace. His task, described in the Book of Wisdom, is to rule “the world in holiness and righteousness” (Wis 9:3).

Unfortunately, if we scan the regions of our planet, we immediately see that humanity has disappointed God's expectations. Man, especially in our time, has without hesitation devastated wooded plains and valleys, polluted waters, disfigured the Earth's habitat, made the air unbreathable, disturbed the hydrogeological and atmospheric systems, turned luxuriant areas into deserts and undertaken forms of unrestrained industrialization, degrading that “flowerbed” – to use an image from Dante Alighieri (*Paradiso*, XXII, 151) – which is the Earth, our dwelling-place.

4. We must therefore encourage and support the “ecological conversion” which in recent decades has made humanity more sensitive to the catastrophe to which it has been heading. 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.

“Another welcome sign is the growing attention being paid to the quality of life and to ecology, especially in more developed societies, where people's expectations are no longer concentrated so much on problems of survival as on the search for an overall

improvement of living conditions” (*Evangelium vitae*, no 27). At stake, then, is not only a “physical” ecology that is concerned to safeguard the habitat of the 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.

5. In this rediscovered harmony with nature and with one another, men and women are once again walking in the garden of creation, seeking to make the goods of the Earth available to all and not just to a privileged few, as the biblical jubilee suggests (cf. Lv 25:8-13, 23). Among those marvels we find the Creator’s voice, transmitted by heaven and Earth, by night and day: a language “with no speech nor words; whose voice is not heard” and which can cross all boundaries (cf. Ps 19[18]:2-5).

The Book of Wisdom, echoed by Paul, celebrates God’s presence in the world, recalling that “from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator” (Wis 13:5; cf. Rom 1:20). This is also praised in the Jewish tradition of the Hasidim: “Where I wander – You! Where I ponder – You!... In every trend, at every end, only You, You again, always You!” (M Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim* [Italian ed., Milan 1979, p 256]).

-- Pope John Paul II, 2001

References to the environment were made by the Pope in his 1998 encyclical, *Fides et Ratio* (Faith and Reason). Ecology was named as being one of the most pressing issues of our day. Again in 1999 John Paul II, in his January World Day of Peace message, highlighted “the endless interdependence between human beings and their environment” as being crucial for the world’s future.

Such sentiments were reiterated by the bishops attending the 1998 Synods for Asia and Oceania and in November 1999 Pope John Paul II issued a summary document from the Synod for Asia: *Ecclesia in Asia*. Under the heading of “The Environment” the Pope had this to say:

When concern for economic and technological progress is not accompanied by concern for the balance of the ecosystem, our Earth is inevitably exposed to serious environmental damage, with consequent harm to human beings. Blatant disrespect for the environment will continue as long as the Earth and its potential are seen merely as objects of immediate use and consumption, to be manipulated by an unbridled desire for profit. It is the duty of Christians and of all who look to God as the Creator to protect the environment by restoring a sense of reverence for the whole of God’s creation. It is the Creator’s will that man should treat nature not as a ruthless exploiter but as an intelligent and responsible administrator.

The Synod Fathers pleaded in a special way for greater responsibility on the part of the leaders of nations, legislators, business people and all who are directly involved in the management of the Earth’s resources. They underlined the need to educate people, especially the young, in environmental responsibility, training them in the stewardship over creation which God has entrusted to humanity. The protection of the environment is not only a technical question; it is also and above all an ethical issue. All have a moral duty to care for the environment, not only for their own good but also for the good of future generations.

In conclusion, it is worth remembering that in calling on Christians to work and sacrifice themselves in the service of human development, the Synod Fathers were drawing upon some of the core insights of biblical and ecclesial tradition. Ancient Israel insisted passionately upon the unbreakable bond between worship of God and care for the weak, represented typically in Scripture as “the widow, the stranger and orphan” (cf. Ex 22:21-22; Dt 10:18; 27:19) who in the societies of the time were most vulnerable to the threat of injustice. Time and again in the Prophets we hear the cry for justice, for the right ordering of human society, without which there can be no true worship of God (cf. Is 1:10-17; Am 5:21-24). In the appeal of the Synod Fathers we thus hear an echo of the Prophets filled with the Spirit of God, who wants “mercy not sacrifice” (Hos 6:6). Jesus made these words his own (cf. Mt 9:13), and the same is true of the Saints in every time and place. Consider the words of Saint John Chrysostom: “Do you wish to honour the body of Christ? Then do not ignore him when he is naked. Do not pay him silken honours in the temple only then to neglect him when he goes cold and naked outside. He who said: ‘this is my body’ is the One who also said, ‘You saw me hungry and you gave me no food’... What good is it if the Eucharistic table groans under the weight of golden chalices, when Christ is dying of hunger? Start by satisfying his hunger, and then with what remains you may adorn the altar as well!” In the Synod’s appeal for human development and for justice in human affairs, we hear a voice that is both old and new. It is old because it rises from the depths of our Christian tradition, which looks to that profound harmony which the Creator intends; it is new because it speaks to the immediate situation of countless people in Asia today.

-- Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation

In this statement the Pope clearly and strongly upholds the dignity of all creation and the interdependence of the total Earth community. From this statement we are led to ask many questions about our treatment of the environment. We are also challenged to broaden our definition of who/what is naked and hungry and how we honour the body of Christ.

In its message to the people of God on the Islands of the Pacific and New Zealand, Australia, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, the special assembly for Oceania of the Synod of Bishops included in its final message on 10 December 1998 the following paragraph which encapsulated the deliberations of the bishops:

“Major concerns included the issues of refugees and migration, environment, unemployment, development funding, health care, sexual abuse and the economy. The sacredness of life, the dignity of the human person, both women and men, and the common good of all peoples were integral to all our considerations.”

Finally, John Paul II, on 22 November 2001, issued his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the ‘Ecclesia in Oceania’. The importance of this statement for the Church in Oceania, but particularly for the Australian Church and its continuing work for environmental justice for this area, cannot be overestimated. The section on the environment, within this Exhortation, follows:

[OHT 12 – Ecclesia in Oceania, Pope John Paul II]

The Environment

31. Oceania is a part of the world of great natural beauty, and it has succeeded in preserving areas that remain unspoiled. The region still offers to indigenous peoples a

place to live in harmony with nature and one another (108). Because creation was entrusted to human stewardship, the natural world is not just a resource to be exploited but also a reality to be respected and even revered as a gift and trust from God. It is the task of human beings to care for, preserve and cultivate the treasures of creation. The Synod Fathers called upon the people of Oceania to rejoice always in the glory of creation in a spirit of thanksgiving to the Creator.

Yet the natural beauty of Oceania has not escaped the ravages of human exploitation. The Synod Fathers called upon the governments and peoples of Oceania to protect this precious environment for present and future generations (109). It is their special responsibility to assume on behalf of all humanity stewardship of the Pacific Ocean, containing over one half of the Earth's total supply of water. The continued health of this and other oceans is crucial for the welfare of peoples not only in Oceania but in every part of the world.

The natural resources of Oceania need to be protected against the harmful policies of some industrialised nations and increasingly powerful transnational corporations which can lead to deforestation, despoliation of the land, pollution of rivers by mining, over-fishing of profitable species, or fouling the fishing grounds with industrial and nuclear waste. The dumping of nuclear waste in the area constitutes an added danger to the health of the indigenous population. Yet it is also important to recognise that industry can bring great benefits when undertaken with due respect for the rights and the culture of the local population and for the integrity of the environment.

As recently as 8 February 2002, John Paul II has been asked by some Italian Catholics to write an encyclical on creation and questions linked to the environment.

SECTION 4

The Praxis – Exploring How These Teachings/Statements Inform Taking Action for Justice

This praxis model is based on Diarmuid O’Murchu’s response to the following question which he raised some years ago at workshops he conducted in Australia:

How should the church respond to the ecological crisis?

[OHT 13 – How should the church respond to the ecological crisis?]

O’Murchu suggests five ways of doing this:

1. Acknowledge the magnitude and urgency of the crisis.
2. Develop an appropriate theology of creation at the local, national and global level. In this context, a vibrant eco-centred ethics is essential.
3. Recognise the transformative power that liturgy and worship have in addressing ecological and justice issues.
4. Ecological concerns ought to be at the heart of pastoral ministry.
5. Promote creation spirituality and simple lifestyles as a way of responding to the destructive impact of our global consumer society.

As well we can add a sixth proposition to this list:

6. Work to change systems/structures that are ecologically unsound.

[Handout 7 – How should the church respond to the ecological crisis?]

Suggestions for engaging at a practical level using the information and concepts outlined in this module:

The process could include work as individuals, in pairs, in small groups, etc. It could also influence further study choices and curriculum design for those in educative institutions at primary, secondary and tertiary levels, as well as providing guidelines at administrative and operational levels.

Some possible questions, etc. follow as a stimulus for engagement with the six suggestions for praxis.

[Handout 8 – Some possible questions]

1. Acknowledge the magnitude and urgency of the crisis:
 - i) What is the magnitude of the crisis
 - from your own knowledge and experience?
 - from other sources?

- ii) What is the urgency of the crisis?
What facts can you think of that would confirm that there is an urgency?
 - iii) How can this magnitude and urgency become known and accepted generally?
 - a) What are some processes in which you could engage to disseminate this conviction?
 - b) What would be some “hurdles” that would have to be overcome in self and others in these processes?
 - iv) At what level, official Church, workplace, local Church, local community, family, etc., can you personally or as a group commit to making known the magnitude and urgency of the crisis?
2. Develop an appropriate theology of creation at the local, national and global level. In this context, a vibrant eco-centred ethics is essential:
- a) Who does “theology”?
What are the “theologians” saying?
What are others, who don’t write as theologians, saying?
 - b) What do you mean by eco-centred ethics?
 - c) How does theology and ethics intersect?
3. Recognise the transformative power that liturgy and worship have in addressing ecological and justice issues:
- i)
 - a) What is liturgy? What is worship?
 - b) What is the purpose of liturgy and worship?
 - ii) What do you mean by the ‘transformative power that liturgy and worship have’?
 - iii) Who/what is being transformed?
 - iv) Where is the transformation leading?
 - v) How then does this translate into ecological and justice issues?
 - vi) What could be included in official Church liturgies and worship that would stimulate ecological and justice transformation?
 - vii) What type of liturgy could you create for your place of work/ministry/family/community that would capture some of these ecological and justice issues that could lead to transformation?
4. Ecological concerns ought to be at the heart of pastoral ministry:
- a) How do you describe pastoral ministry?
 - b) Who ‘does’ pastoral ministry?
 - c) What are the ecological concerns?

- d) How is this put into practical everyday living: Personally? Locally? Globally? As a Church?
5. Promote creation spirituality and simple lifestyles as a way of responding to the destructive impact of our global consumer society (an alternative description for this spirituality would be “ecological spirituality”):
- i) Creation (Ecological) Spirituality
- a) What do you understand by creation (ecological) spirituality?
 - b) From the handouts what further understanding have you gained?
 - c) How does scripture and Church tradition fit into this?
 - d) How could creation spirituality be used within liturgy and worship?
 - e) Do you need to do some study around this topic? Where can you find appropriate information about this?
 - f) How do you promote creation spirituality?
- ii) Promote simple lifestyles
- a) Describe a simple lifestyle that is counter to the destructive impact of our global consumer society.
 - b) Does putting this into practice require an ecological conversion?
 - c) In your own life how can you change some of the environmentally destructive practices that are so much part of the society in which we live?
 - d) What would be some of the difficulties you would encounter if you espouse this ecological conversion?
 - e) How can you encourage this simple lifestyle
 - in the home?
 - in the workplace?
 - in the church?
 - in the local community?
 - others?
6. Work to change systems/structures that are ecologically unsound:
- a) Do you believe that change at this level is critical for the future of the total Earth community?
 - b) What networks are available for you to join which would help in this change at systems/structures level?
 - c) What systems/structures are you involved in that are ecologically unsound? – in your home, local community, school, Church, work, local government, state and federal governments, Asia/Pacific region, others?
 - d) What could you do individually and as part of a group to change these systems/structures?

SECTION 5

Resources [Handout 9 – Resources]

Websites:

1. Vatican – The Holy See: http://www.vatican.va/phome_en.htm
2. Australian Catholic Bishops Conference: <http://www.acbc.catholic.org.au/>
3. Catholic Justice and Peace Commission – Archdiocese of Brisbane: <http://www.uq.net.au/cjpc/>
4. Australian Catholic Social Justice Council: <http://www.acsjc.org.au/index.shtml>
5. Catholic Social Teaching, Office for Social Justice, Archdiocese of St Paul and Minneapolis: <http://www.osjspm.org/cst/index.html>
6. Office for Social Justice, Archdiocese of St Paul and Minneapolis: <http://www.osjspm.org/>
7. Forum on Religion and Ecology: <http://environment.harvard.edu/religion/>
8. Center of Concern: <http://www.coc.org/>
9. Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns: <http://home.maryknoll.org/index.php?module=MKArticles&office=global>
10. Uniya – Jesuit Social Justice Centre: <http://www.uniya.org/>
11. Woodstock Theological Center: <http://www.georgetown.edu/centers/woodstock/>
12. Voices for Justice – A newsletter of the Missionary Society of St Columban (Ireland): <http://www.columban.com/voijus.htm>
13. Social Development and World Peace – US Conference of Catholic Bishops: <http://www.nccbuscc.org/sdwp/ejp/>
14. Sierra Club: <http://www.sierraclub.org/>
15. Climate Action Network Australia: <http://www.cana.net.au/>

Compass Articles:

Vol. 32, Winter 1997:
Quantum Theology – Paul Castley, msc

Vol. 30, Autumn 1996:
Promoting Catholic Ecological Action – Charles Rue ssc

Vol. 30, Summer 1996:

The Ecological Conversion – Should Religious Women and Men Make a Contribution – Susan Smith rmdm

Vol. 29, Autumn 1995:

Minding the Universe: Aboriginal Leads to Australian Spirituality – Eugene D Stockton

Vol. 27, Spring 1993:

Creation Theology: How Well Are We Coping with Ecological Issues? – Neil Darragh

Vol. 26, Autumn 1992:

Christian Spirituality and the Environment Movement – Len Baglow

Vol. 25, Autumn 1990:

Sacred Story – Sacred Land – Eugene D Stockton

Do We need a New Ecological Ethics? – John Begley sj

The Cosmic Theology of Karl Rahner – Denis Edwards msc

Vol. 24, Summer 1990:

The New Creation and the Australian Aborigines – Frank Fletcher msc

Books:

Catholic Social Teaching Source Material

A Just and Peaceful Land – Rural and Regional Australia in 2001

Social Justice Sunday Statement – Australian Bishops' Conference

Australian Catholics – The Social Justice Tradition

Michael Hogan (Collins Dove 1993)

Catholic Social Teaching – Our Best Kept Secret

Mark O'Connor (ed) (Collins Dove 1992)

John Paul II – The Encyclicals in Everyday Language

Joseph G Donders (ed) (E J Dwyer 1996)

Option for the Poor – A Hundred Years of Vatican Social Teaching

Donal Dorr (Gill & Macmillan 1983)

Our Quest for Ecological Integrity: What is the Catholic Role in the Environment?

Michael Gormly ssc (Catholic Social Justice Series No. 37)

Study Week on a Modern Approach to the Protection of the Environment, November 2-7, 1987

Pontificiae Academiae Scientiarum Documenta (23)

Study Week on Man and His Environment, Tropical Forests and the Conservation of Species, May

14-18, 1990, Pontificiae Academiae Scientiarum Scripta Varia (84)

The Social Justice Agenda – Justice, Ecology, Power and the Church

Donal Dorr (Collins Dove 1991)

General Source Material

This is a short list of THEOLOGICAL, SCRIPTURAL, SPIRITUAL, SOCIOLOGICAL books by Catholic authors. Many more are available by the same and other writers.

McDonagh, Sean

Greening the Earth (Claretian 1990)

Passion for the Earth (Geoffrey Chapman 1994)

To Care for the Earth: A Call to a New Theology (Claretian 1986)

Donovan, Vincent J

The Church in the Midst of Creation (Orbis 1992)

Collins, Paul

God's Earth: Religion as if Matter Really Mattered (Dove 1995)

Edwards, Denis

The God of Evolution – A Trinitarian Theology (Paulist 1999)

Kelly, Tony

An Expanding Theology: Faith in a World of Connections (EJ Dwyer 1993)

O'Murchu, Diarmuid

Reclaiming Spirituality: A New Spiritual Framework for Today's World (Gill & Macmillan 1997)

Quantum Theology: Spiritual Implications of the New Physics (Crossroad 1997)

Berry cp, Thomas & Clarke sj, Thomas

Befriending the Earth: A Theology of Reconciliation between Humans and the Earth (Twenty-third Publications 1991)