

Catholic Social Teaching 1891–1991

1891	<hr/>	<i>Rerum Novarum</i> (Leo XIII) (The Condition of Labour)
1931	<hr/>	<i>Quadragesimo Anno</i> (Pius XI) (The Reconstruction of the Social Order – 40 th year)
1961	<hr/>	<i>Mater et Magistra</i> (John XXIII) (Mother and Teacher – Christianity and Social Progress)
1963	<hr/>	<i>Pacem in Terris</i> (John XXIII) (Peace on Earth)
1965	<hr/>	<i>Gaudium et Spes</i> (Vatican II) The Church in the Modern World
1967	<hr/>	<i>Populorum Progressio</i> (Paul VI) (Progress/Development of Peoples)
1971	<hr/>	<i>Octogesima Adveniens</i> (Paul VI) (Apostolic Letter: Call to Action – 80 th year)
1971	<hr/>	<i>Justice in the World</i> (Synod of Bishops)
1975	<hr/>	<i>Evangelii Nuntiandi</i> (Paul VI) (Evangelisation in the Modern World)
1981	<hr/>	<i>Laborem Exercens</i> (John Paul II) (On Human Work)
1987	<hr/>	<i>Sollicitudo Rei Socialis</i> (John Paul II) (Social Concerns of the Church)
1989	<hr/>	<i>Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all of Creation</i> (John Paul II)
1990	<hr/>	<i>Redemptoris Missio</i> (John Paul II) (Missionary Activity of the Church)
1991	<hr/>	<i>Centesimus Annus</i> (John Paul II) (One Hundred Years)

Catholic Social Teaching



Summary of the Main 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 world-wide 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)



Key Principles of Catholic Social Teaching Expanded

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.

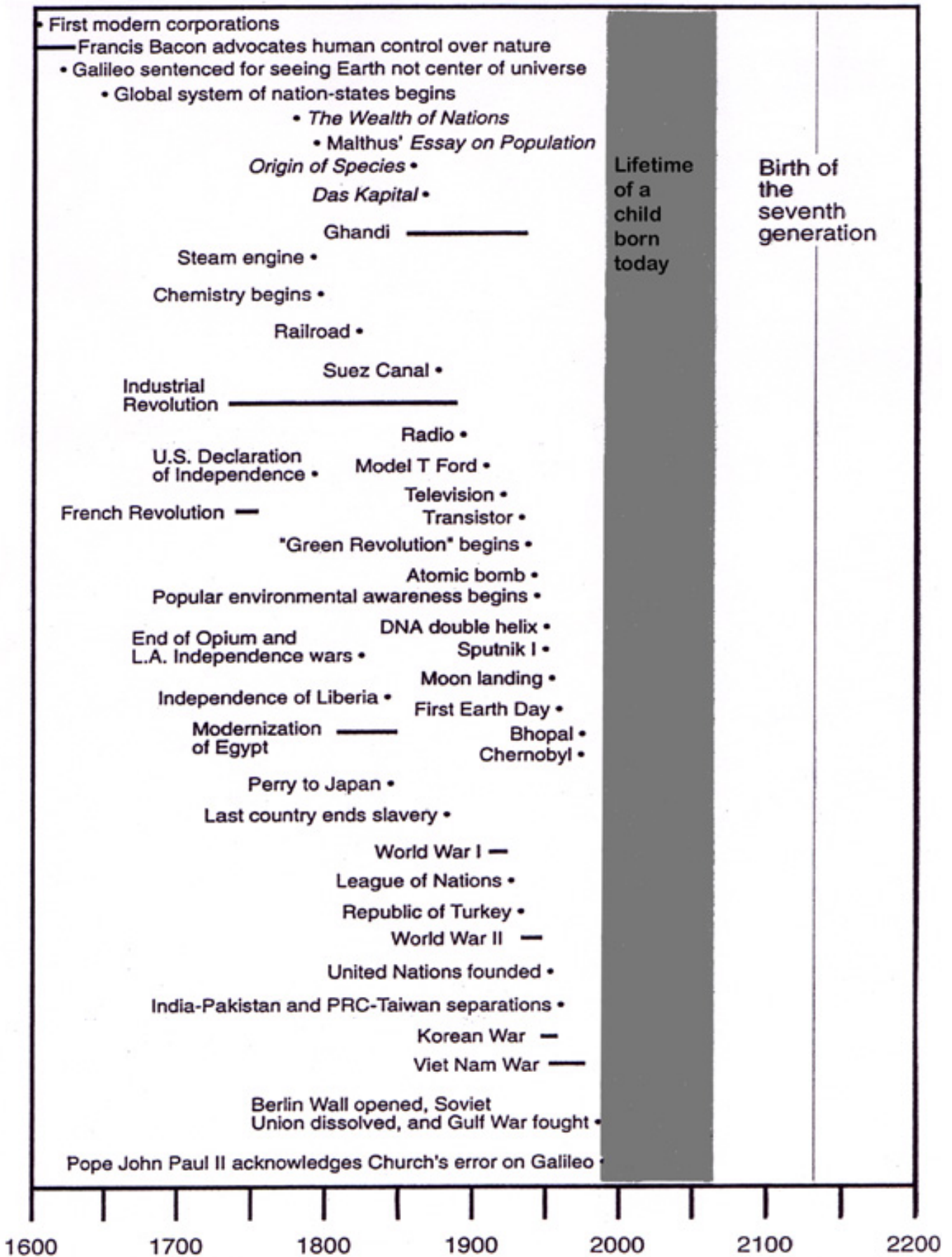


Figure 1: Philosophical ideas, historic events, and scientific discoveries during the period 1600 to present. All figures: Copyright © 1993 by the MILLENNIUM INSTITUTE. All rights reserved.

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

**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 (Solicitud Rei Socialis) 1988, No. 34



**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.**

-- Pope Paul VI to the Council of the World Wildlife Fund, 1969



(Photo courtesy of ECO PIX - Ecological Pictures, PO Box 67, Scarborough Qld Australia 4020
Phone/fax 61 (0)7 3880 0498)

**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.**

**-- Pope Paul VI to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization,
1970**

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.

**-- Pope links beauty of creation to God's love
Angelus Address given in the Italian Alps, 15 July 2001**



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.

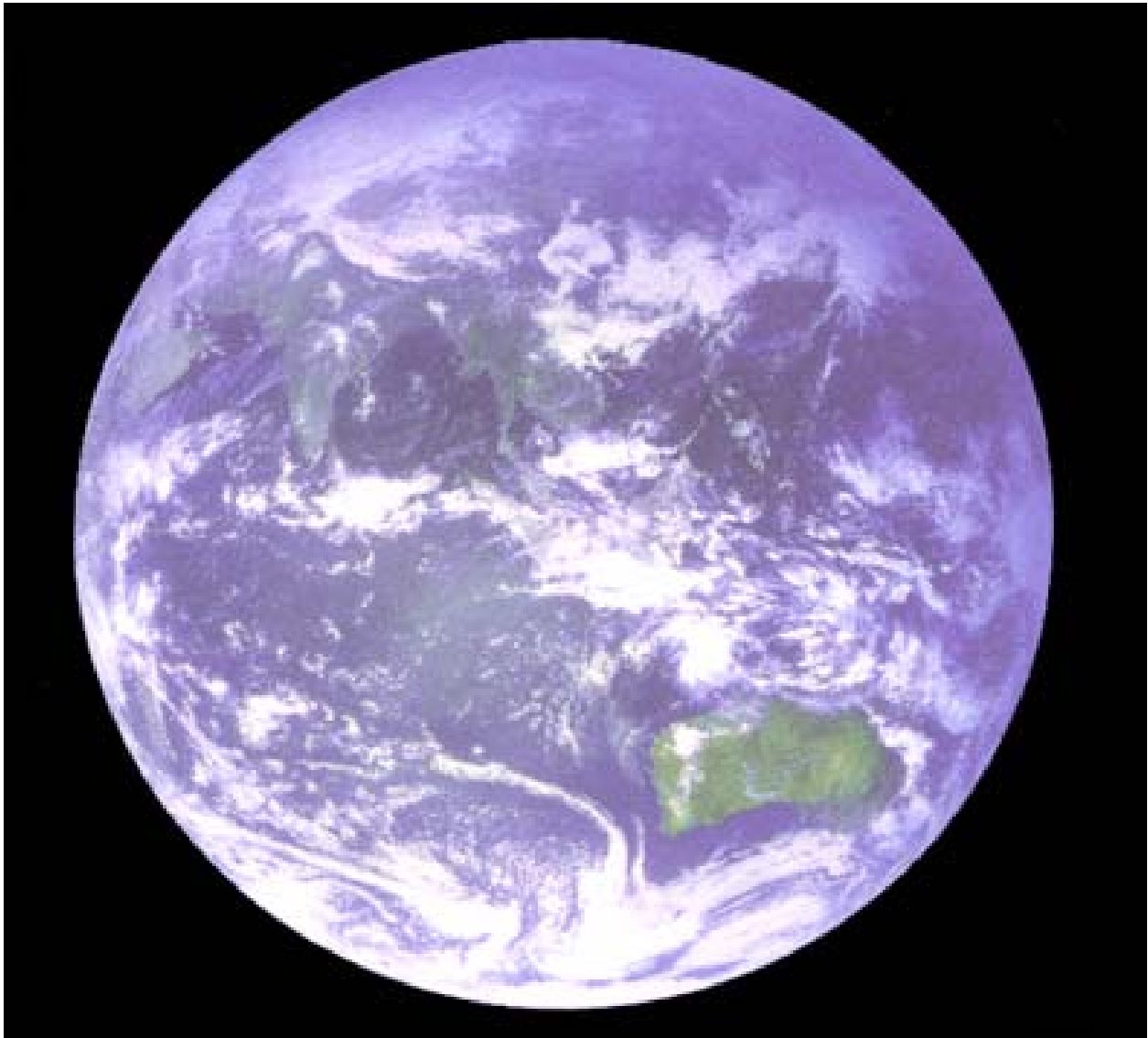
Faced with the widespread destruction of the environment, people everywhere are coming to understand that we cannot continue to use the goods of the Earth as we have in the past. The public in general as well as political leaders are concerned about this problem, and experts from a wide range of disciplines 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, 1 January 1990*



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



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. (Emphasis SAO)

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]).

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.

-- *Ecclesia in Oceania*, Pope John Paul II, 22 November 2001



How should the church respond to the ecological crisis?

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.
(D O'Murchu)
6. Work to change systems/structures that are ecologically unsound.

