

*An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment
in Light of Catholic Social Teaching*

*A Pastoral Statement of the United States Catholic Conference
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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. . . . [A] new *ecological awareness* is beginning to emerge. . . . The ecological crisis is a moral issue.

Pope John Paul II, *The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility*, nos. 1, 15, December 8, 1989

I. Signs of the Times

At its core, the environmental crisis is a moral challenge. It calls us to examine how we use and share the goods of the earth, what we pass on to future generations, and how we live in harmony with God's creation.

The effects of environmental degradation surround us: the smog in our cities; chemicals in our water and on our food; eroded topsoil blowing in the wind; the loss of valuable wetlands; radioactive and toxic waste lacking adequate disposal sites; threats to the health of industrial and farm workers. The problems, however, reach far beyond our own neighborhoods and work-places. Our problems are the world's problems and burdens for generations to come. Poisoned water crosses borders freely. Acid rain pours on countries that do not create it. Greenhouse gases and chlorofluorocarbons affect the earth's atmosphere for many decades, regardless of where they are produced or used.

Opinions vary about the causes and the seriousness of environmental problems. Still, we can experience their effects in polluted air and water; in oil and wastes on our beaches; in the loss of farmland, wetlands, and forests; and in the decline of rivers and lakes. Scientists identify several other less visible but particularly urgent problems currently being debated by the scientific community, including depletion of the ozone layer, deforestation, the extinction of species, the generation and disposal of toxic and nuclear waste, and global warming. These important issues are being explored by scientists, and they require urgent attention and action. We are not scientists, but as pastors we call on experts, citizens, and policymakers to continue to explore the serious environmental, ethical, and human dimensions of these ecological challenges.

Environmental issues are also linked to other basic problems. As eminent scientist Dr. Thomas F. Malone reported, humanity faces problems in five interrelated fields: environment, energy, economics, equity, and ethics. To ensure the survival of a healthy planet, then, we must not only establish a sustainable economy but must also labor for justice both within and among nations. We must seek a society where economic life and environmental commitment work together to protect and to enhance life on this planet.

A. Aims of This Statement

With these pastoral reflections, we hope to add a distinctive and constructive voice to the ecological dialogue already under way in our nation and in our Church. These are beginning reflections for us, not final conclusions. We want to stimulate dialogue, particularly with the scientific community. We know

these are not simple matters. We speak as pastors, offering our thoughts on a global problem that many people also recognize as a moral and religious crisis as well. In speaking out at this time, we have six goals:

1. to highlight the ethical dimensions of the environmental crisis;
2. to link questions of ecology and poverty, environment and development;
3. to stand with working men and women and poor and disadvantaged persons, whose lives are often impacted by ecological abuse and tradeoffs between environment and development;
4. to promote a vision of a just and sustainable world community;
5. to invite the Catholic community and men and women of good will to reflect more deeply on the religious dimensions of this topic; and
6. to begin a broader conversation on the potential contribution of the Church to environmental questions.

Above all, we seek to explore the links between concern for the person and for the earth, between natural ecology and social ecology. The web of life is one. Our mistreatment of the natural world diminishes our own dignity and sacredness, not only because we are destroying resources that future generations of humans need, but because we are engaging in actions that contradict what it means to be human. Our tradition calls us to protect the life and dignity of the human person, and it is increasingly clear that this task cannot be separated from the care and defense of all of creation.

B. Justice and the Environment

The whole human race suffers as a result of environmental blight, and generations yet unborn will bear the cost for our failure to act today. But in most countries today, including our own, it is the poor and the powerless who most directly bear the burden of current environmental carelessness. Their lands and neighborhoods are more likely to be polluted or to host toxic waste dumps, their water to be undrinkable, their children to be harmed. Too often, the structure of sacrifice involved in environmental remedies seems to exact a high price from the poor and from workers. Small farmers, industrial workers, lumberjacks, watermen, rubber-tappers, for example, shoulder much of the weight of economic adjustment. Caught in a spiral of poverty and environmental degradation, poor people suffer acutely from the loss of soil fertility, pollution of rivers and urban streets, and the destruction of forest resources. Overcrowding and unequal land distribution often force them to overwork the soil, clear the forests, or migrate to marginal land. Their efforts to eke out a bare existence adds in its own way to environmental degradation and not infrequently to disaster for themselves and others who are equally poor.

Sustainable economic policies, that is, practices that reduce current stresses on natural systems and are consistent with sound environmental policy in the long term, must be put into effect. At the same time, the world economy must come to include hundreds of millions of poor families who live at the edge of survival.

C. Catholic Responses

In the face of these challenges, a new spirit of responsibility for the earth has begun to grow. Essential laws are being passed; vital anti-pollution efforts are underway; public concern is growing.

American Catholics are an integral part of this new awareness and action. In many small ways, we are learning more, caring more, and doing more about the environment and the threats to it. As a community of faith, we are also seeking to understand more clearly the ethical and religious dimensions of this challenge. This pastoral message, building on the previous statements and actions of individual bishops, dioceses, state conferences, and the episcopal conferences of other nations, as well as on the reflections and research of theologians, scientists, and environmentalists, is an effort to help that understanding. A distinctively Catholic contribution to contemporary environmental awareness arises from our understanding of human beings as part of nature, although not limited to it. Catholics look to nature, in natural theology, for indications of God's existence and purpose. In elaborating a natural moral law, we look to natural processes themselves for norms for human behavior. With such limits in mind, Pope John Paul II in *Centesimus Annus* urged that in addition to protecting natural systems and other species, we "*safeguard the moral conditions for an authentic 'human ecology'*" in urban planning, work environments, and family life (*Centesimus Annus* [=CA], no. 38). Nature is not, in Catholic teaching, merely a field to exploit at will or a museum piece to be preserved at all costs. We are not gods, but stewards of the earth.

We recognize with appreciation the efforts of other Christian churches and people of other faiths on behalf of the planet. We accept our common religious responsibility to shape an ethic of care for the earth.

Our own Campaign for Human Development supports a wide variety of local environmental efforts. Among them are the following projects:

- In Washington State, a farm worker organization tries to reduce pesticides in the apple industry.
- In rural Mississippi, a community coalition seeks to secure greater access to drinkable water.
- In Jersey City, forty local parishes and congregations seek the removal of chromium wastes from the building site for 600 affordable homes they have sponsored.
- In Oakland, California, immigrant Asian women try to monitor the exposure of electronics workers to hazardous chemicals.
- In our nation's capital, victims of radiation released from government nuclear programs lobby for medical treatment of their injuries.

Across our nation, the National Catholic Rural Life Conference continues to urge greater respect for the land; to advocate sustainable agricultural practices; to combat soil loss and water pollution; to promote a fair living for those who work the land; and to assist religious communities and local churches in the management of the farms, forests, and wetlands they hold.

In addition, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) furthers the Church's commitment to proper use of technology in its rural development projects, which aim at sustainable agriculture and community-based development in other countries. To help reverse the cycle of poverty and environmental decline

in the Third World, CRS assists projects such as these.

- In the highlands of Peru, fifty-four communities have been able to increase agricultural production by readopting sustainable farming methods used by their pre-Inca ancestors that help crops resist drought and frost damage.
- In Bangladesh, a local organization has developed a program to process the toxins from waste water using an aquatic surface plant, duckweed, so that river-dwellers are protected from water-borne diseases.
- In Madagascar, where overcrowding has caused serious deforestation, the government and local groups are training transient farmers to grow crops in productive but environmentally safe ways.
- In Egypt, two communities have established a waste water collection and disposal system, benefiting 3,500 families.

D. A Call to Reflection and Action

Grateful for the gift of creation and contrite in the face of the deteriorating condition of the natural world, we invite Catholics and men and women of good will in every walk of life to consider with us the moral issues raised by the environmental crisis.

We ask the Catholic community: How are we called to care for God's creation? How may we apply our social teaching, with its emphasis on the life and dignity of the human person, to the challenge of protecting the earth, our common home? What can we in the Catholic community offer to the environmental movement, and what can we learn from it? How can we encourage a serious dialogue in the Catholic community—in our parishes, schools, colleges, universities, and other settings—on the significant ethical dimensions of the environmental crisis?

To other people of good will across this country, we say: How do we proceed to frame a common and workable environmental ethic? What steps can we take to devise a sustainable and just economy? What can we do to link more firmly in the public mind both the commitment to justice and duties to the environment? How can we recognize and confront the possible conflicts between environment and jobs, and work for the common good and solutions that value both people and the earth? How do we secure protection for all God's creatures, including the poor and the unborn? How can the United States, as a nation, act responsibly about this ever more global problem? And how, in working for a sustainable global economy, do we fulfill our obligations in justice to the poor of the Third World?

These are matters of powerful urgency and major consequence. They constitute an exceptional call to conversion. As individuals, as institutions, as a people, we need a change of heart to preserve and protect the planet for our children and for generations yet unborn.

II. The Biblical Vision of God's Good Earth

Biblical studies are deepening our understanding of the creation story and its meaning for our developing views of the natural world.

A. The Witness of the Hebrew Scriptures

Christian responsibility for the environment begins with appreciation of the goodness of all God's creation. In the beginning, "God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good" (Gn 1:31). The heavens and the earth, the sun and the moon, the earth and the sea, fish and birds, animals and humans—all are good. God's wisdom and power were present in every aspect of the unfolding of creation (see Prv 8:22-31).

It is no wonder that when God's people were filled with the spirit of prayer, they invited all creation to join their praise of God's goodness.

Let the earth bless the Lord;
praise and exalt him above all forever.
Mountains and hills, bless the Lord;
praise and exalt him above all forever.
Everything growing from the earth,
bless the Lord;
praise and exalt him above all forever.
You springs, bless the Lord;
praise and exalt him above all forever.
Seas and rivers, bless the Lord;
praise and exalt him above all forever.
You dolphins and all water creatures,
bless the Lord;
praise and exalt him above all forever.
All you birds of the air, bless the Lord;
praise and exalt him above all forever.
All you beasts, wild and tame, bless the Lord;
praise and exalt him above all forever
(Dn 3:74-81).

The earth, the Bible reminds us, is a gift to all creatures, to "all living beings—all mortal creatures that are on earth" (Gn 9:16-17).

People share the earth with other creatures. But humans, made in the image and likeness of God, are called in a special way to "cultivate and care for it" (Gn 2:15). Men and women, therefore, bear a unique responsibility under God: to safeguard the created world and by their creative labor even to enhance it. Safeguarding creation requires us to live responsibly within it, rather than manage creation as though we are outside it. The human family is charged with preserving the beauty, diversity, and integrity of nature, as well as with fostering its productivity. Yet, God alone is sovereign over the whole earth. "The LORD'S are the earth and its fullness; the world and those who dwell in it" (Ps 24:1). Like the patriarch Noah, humanity stands responsible for ensuring that all nature can continue to thrive as God intended. After the flood, God made a lasting covenant with Noah, his descendants, and "every living creature." We are not free, therefore, to use created things capriciously.

Humanity's arrogance and acquisitiveness, however, led time and again to our growing alienation from nature (see Gn 3–4, 6–9, 11ff). In the Bible's account of Noah, the world's new beginning was marked by the estrangement of humans from nature. The sins of humankind laid waste the land. Hosea, for example, cries out:

There is no fidelity, no mercy,
no knowledge of God in the land.
False swearing, lying, murder, stealing
and adultery!
in their lawlessness, bloodshed
follows bloodshed.
Therefore, the land mourns,
and everything that dwells in it
languishes:
The beasts of the field,
the birds of the air,
and even the fish of the sea perish
(Hos 4:1b-3).

In the biblical vision, therefore, injustice results in suffering for all creation.

To curb the abuse of the land and of fellow humans, ancient Israel set out legal protections aimed at restoring the original balance between land and people (see Lv 25). Every seventh year, the land and people were to rest; nature would be restored by human restraint. And every seventh day, the Sabbath rest gave relief from unremitting toil to workers and beasts alike. It invited the whole community to taste the goodness of God in creation. In worship, moreover, the Sabbath continues to remind us of our dependence on God as his creatures, and so of our kinship with all that God has made. But people did not honor the law. A few went on accumulating land, many were dispossessed, and the land itself became exhausted. God then sent his prophets to call the people back to their responsibility. Again the people hardened their hearts; they had compassion for neither the land nor its people. The prophets promised judgment for the evil done the people of the land, but they also foresaw a day of restoration, when the harmony between humanity and the natural world would be renewed (see Is 32:15b-20).

B. The Gospel Message

Jesus came proclaiming a jubilee (see Lk 4:16-22) in which humanity, and with us all creation, was to be liberated (see Rom 8:18-25). He taught about salvation, however, with a countryman's knowledge of the land. God's grace was like wheat growing in the night (see Mk 4:26-29); divine love like a shepherd seeking a lost sheep (see Lk 15:4-7). In the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, Jesus found reason for his disciples to give up the ceaseless quest for material security and advantage and to trust in God (see Mt 6:25-33). Jesus himself is the Good Shepherd, who gives his life for his flock (see Jn 10). His Father is a vineyard worker, who trims vines so that they may bear more abundant fruit (see Jn 15:1-8). These familiar images, though they speak directly to humanity's encounter with God, at the same time reveal that the fundamental relation between humanity and nature is one of caring for creation.

The new covenant made in Jesus' blood overcomes all hostility and restores the order of love. Just as in his person Christ has destroyed the hostility that divided people from one another, so he has overcome the opposition between humanity and nature. For he is the firstborn of a new creation and gives his Spirit to renew the whole earth (see Col 2:18; Ps 104:30). The fruits of that Spirit—joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness, and self-control (see Gal 5:22)—mark us as Christ's own people. As they incline us to "serve one another through love" (Gal 5:13), they may also dispose us to live carefully on the earth, with respect for all God's creatures. Our Christian way of life, as saints like Benedict, Hildegard, and Francis showed us, is a road to community with all creation.

III. Catholic Social Teaching and Environmental Ethics

The tradition of Catholic social teaching offers a developing and distinctive perspective on environmental issues. We believe that the following themes drawn from this tradition are integral dimensions of ecological responsibility:

- *a God-centered and sacramental view of the universe*, which grounds human accountability for the fate of the earth;
- a consistent *respect for human life*, which extends to respect for all creation;
- a worldview affirming the ethical significance of *global interdependence and the common good*;
- *an ethics of solidarity* promoting cooperation and a just structure of sharing in the world community;
- an understanding of *the universal purpose of created things*, which requires equitable use of the earth's resources;
- *an option for the poor*, which gives passion to the quest for an equitable and sustainable world;
- a conception of *authentic development*, which offers a direction for progress that respects human dignity and the limits of material growth.

Although Catholic social teaching does not offer a complete environmental ethic, we are confident that this developing tradition can serve as the basis for Catholic engagement and dialogue with science, the environmental movement, and other communities of faith and good will.

A. A Sacramental Universe

The whole universe is God's dwelling. Earth, a very small, uniquely blessed corner of that universe, gifted with unique natural blessings, is humanity's home, and humans are never so much at home as when God dwells with them. In the beginning, the first man and woman walked with God in the cool of the day. Throughout history, people have continued to meet the Creator on mountaintops, in vast deserts, and alongside waterfalls and gently flowing springs. In storms and earthquakes, they found expressions of divine power. In the cycle of the seasons and the courses of the stars, they have discerned signs of God's fidelity and wisdom. We still share, though dimly, in that sense of God's presence in nature. But as heirs and victims of the industrial revolution, students of science and the beneficiaries of technology, urban-dwellers and jet-commuters, twentieth-century Americans have also grown estranged from the natural scale and rhythms of life on earth.

For many people, the environmental movement has reawakened appreciation of the truth that, through the created gifts of nature, men and women encounter their Creator. The Christian vision of a sacramental universe—a world that discloses the Creator's presence by visible and tangible signs—can contribute to making the earth a home for the human family once again. Pope John Paul II has called for Christians to respect and protect the environment, so that through nature people can "contemplate the mystery of the greatness and love of God."

Reverence for the Creator present and active in nature, moreover, may serve as ground for environmental responsibility. For the very plants and animals, mountains and oceans, which in their loveliness and sublimity lift our minds to God, by their fragility and perishing likewise cry out, "We have not made ourselves." God brings them into being and sustains them in existence. It is to the Creator of the universe, then, that we are accountable for what we do or fail to do to preserve and care for the earth and all its creatures. For "[t]he LORD'S are the earth and its fullness; the world and those who dwell in it" (Ps 24:1). Dwelling in the presence of God, we begin to experience ourselves as part of creation, as stewards within it, not separate from it. As faithful stewards, fullness of life comes from living responsibly within God's creation.

Stewardship implies that we must both care for creation according to standards that are not of our own making and at the same time be resourceful in finding ways to make the earth flourish. It is a difficult balance, requiring both a sense of limits and a spirit of experimentation. Even as we rejoice in earth's goodness and in the beauty of nature, stewardship places upon us responsibility for the well-being of all God's creatures.

B. Respect for Life

Respect for nature and respect for human life are inextricably related. "Respect for life, and above all for the dignity of the human person," Pope John Paul II has written, extends also to the rest of creation (*The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility* [=EC], no. 7). Other species, ecosystems, and even distinctive landscapes give glory to God. The covenant given to Noah was a promise to all the earth.

See, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you: all the birds, and the various tame and wild animals that were with you and came out of the ark (Gn 9:9-10).

The diversity of life manifests God's glory. Every creature shares a bit of the divine beauty. Because the divine goodness could not be represented by one creature alone, Aquinas tells us, God "produced many and diverse creatures, so that what was wanting to one in representation of the divine goodness might be supplied by another . . . hence the whole universe together participates in the divine goodness more perfectly, and represents it better than any single creature whatever" (*Summa Theologica*, Prima Pars, question 48, ad 2). The wonderful variety of the natural world is, therefore, part of the divine plan and, as such, invites our respect. Accordingly, it is appropriate that we treat other creatures and the natural world not just as means to human fulfillment but also as God's creatures, possessing an independent value, worthy of our respect and care.

By preserving natural environments, by protecting endangered species, by laboring to make human environments compatible with local ecology, by employing appropriate technology, and by carefully evaluating technological innovations as we adopt them, we exhibit respect for creation and reverence for the Creator.

C. The Planetary Common Good

In 1963, Pope John XXIII, in the letter *Pacem in Terris*, emphasized the world's growing interdependence. He saw problems emerging, which the traditional political mechanisms could no longer address, and he extended the traditional principle of the common good from the nation-state to the world community. Ecological concern has now heightened our awareness of just how

interdependent our world is. Some of the gravest environmental problems are clearly global. In this shrinking world, everyone is affected and everyone is responsible, although those most responsible are often the least affected. The universal common good can serve as a foundation for a global environmental ethic.

In many of his statements, Pope John Paul II has recognized the need for such an ethic. For example, in *The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility, his 1990 World Day of Peace Message*, he wrote,

Today the ecological crisis has assumed such proportions as to be the responsibility of everyone. . . . [I]ts various aspects demonstrate the need for concerted efforts aimed at establishing the duties and obligations that belong to individuals, peoples, States and the international community (no. 15).

Governments have particular responsibility in this area. In *Centesimus Annus*, the pope insists that the state has the task of providing "for the defense and preservation of common good such as the natural and human environments, which cannot be safeguarded simply by market forces" (no. 40).

D. A New Solidarity

In the Catholic tradition, the universal common good is specified by the duty of solidarity, "*a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good,*" a willingness "to 'lose oneself' for the sake of the other[s] instead of exploiting [them]" (Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* [=SRS], no. 38). In the face of "the structures of sin," moreover, solidarity requires sacrifices of our own self-interest for the good of others and of the earth we share. Solidarity places special obligations upon the industrial democracies, including the United States. "The ecological crisis," Pope John Paul II has written, "reveals the *urgent moral need for a new solidarity*, especially in relations between the developing nations and those that are highly industrialized" (EC, no. 10). Only with equitable and sustainable development can poor nations curb continuing environmental degradation and avoid the destructive effects of the kind of overdevelopment that has used natural resources irresponsibly.

E. Universal Purpose of Created Things

God has given the fruit of the earth to sustain the entire human family "without excluding or favoring anyone." Human work has enhanced the productive capacity of the earth and in our time is as Pope John Paul II has said, "increasingly important as the productive factor both of non-material and of material wealth" (CA, no. 31). But a great many people, in the Third World as well as in our own inner cities and rural areas, are still deprived of the means of livelihood. In moving toward an environmentally sustainable economy, we are obligated to work for a just economic system which equitably shares the bounty of the earth and of human enterprise with all peoples. Created things belong not to the few, but to the entire human family.

F. Option for the Poor

The ecological problem is intimately connected to justice for the poor. "The goods of the earth, which in the divine plan should be a common patrimony," Pope John Paul II has reminded us, "often risk becoming the monopoly of a few who often spoil it and, sometimes, destroy it, thereby creating a loss for all humanity" (October 25, 1991 address at conference marking the presentation of the Second Edition of the St. Francis "Canticle of the Creatures" International Award for the Environment).

The poor of the earth offer a special test of our solidarity. The painful adjustments we have to undertake in our own economies for the sake of the environment must not diminish our sensitivity to the needs of the poor at home and abroad. The option for the poor embedded in the Gospel and the Church's teaching makes us aware that the poor suffer most directly from environmental decline and have the least access to relief from their suffering. Indigenous peoples die with their forests and grasslands. In Bhopal and Chernobyl, it was the urban poor and working people who suffered the most immediate and intense contamination. Nature will truly enjoy its second spring only when humanity has compassion for its own weakest members.

A related and vital concern is the Church's constant commitment to the dignity of work and the rights of workers. Environmental progress cannot come at the expense of workers and their rights. Solutions must be found that do not force us to choose between a decent environment and a decent life for workers.

We recognize the potential conflicts in this area and will work for greater understanding, communication, and common ground between workers and environmentalists. Clearly, workers cannot be asked to make sacrifices to improve the environment without concrete support from the broader community. Where jobs are lost, society must help in the process of economic conversion, so that not only the earth but also workers and their families are protected.

G. Authentic Development

Unrestrained economic development is not the answer to improving the lives of the poor. Catholic social teaching has never accepted material growth as a model of development. A "*mere accumulation* of goods and services, even for the benefit of the majority," as Pope John Paul II has said, "is not enough for the realization of human happiness" (SRS, no. 28). He has also warned that in a desire "to have and to enjoy rather than to be and to grow," humanity "consumes the resources of the earth, subjecting it without restraint . . . as if it did not have its own requisites and God-given purposes."

Authentic development supports moderation and even austerity in the use of material resources. It also encourages a balanced view of human progress consistent with respect for nature. Furthermore, it invites the development of alternative visions of the good society and the use of economic models with richer standards of well-being than material productivity alone. Authentic development also requires affluent nations to seek ways to reduce and restructure their over consumption of natural resources. Finally, authentic development also entails encouraging the proper use of both agricultural and industrial technologies, so that development does not merely mean technological advancement for its own sake but rather that technology benefits people and enhances the land.

H. Consumption and Population

In public discussions, two areas are particularly cited as requiring greater care and judgment on the part of human beings. The first is *consumption of resources*. The second is *growth in world population*. Regrettably, advantaged groups often seem more intent on curbing Third-World births than on restraining the even more voracious consumerism of the developed world. We believe this compounds injustice and increases disrespect for the life of the weakest among us. For example, it is not so much population growth, but the desperate efforts of debtor countries to pay their foreign debt by exporting products to affluent industrial countries that drives poor peasants off their land and up eroding hillsides, where in the effort to survive, they also destroy the environment.

Consumption in developed nations remains the single greatest source of global environmental destruction. A child born in the United States, for example, puts a far heavier burden on the world's resources than one born in a poor developing country. By one estimate, each American uses twenty-eight times the energy of a person living in a developing country. Advanced societies, and our own in particular, have barely begun to make efforts at reducing their consumption of resources and the enormous waste and pollution that result from it. We in the developed world, therefore, are obligated to address our own wasteful and destructive use of resources as a matter of top priority.

The key factor, though not the only one, in dealing with population problems is sustainable social and economic development. Technological fixes do not really work. Only when an economy distributes resources so as to allow the poor an equitable stake in society and some hope for the future do couples see responsible parenthood as good for their families. In particular, prenatal care; education; good nutrition; and health care for women, children, and families promise to improve family welfare and contribute to stabilizing population. Supporting such equitable social development, moreover, may well be the best contribution affluent societies, like the United States, can make to relieving ecological pressures in less developed nations.

At the same time, it must be acknowledged that rapid population growth presents special problems and challenges that must be addressed in order to avoid damage done to the environment and to social development. In the words of Pope Paul VI, "It is not to be denied that accelerated demographic increases too frequently add difficulties to plans for development because the population is increased more rapidly than available resources . . ." (*Populorum Progressio*, no. 37). In *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, Pope John Paul II has likewise noted, "One cannot deny the existence, especially in the southern hemisphere, of a demographic problem which creates difficulties for development" (no. 25). He has gone on to make connections among population size, development, and the environment. There is "a greater realization of the limits of available resources," he commented, "and of the need to respect the integrity and the cycles of nature and to take them into account when planning for development . . ." (no. 26). Even though it is possible to feed a growing population, the ecological costs of doing so ought to be taken into account. To eliminate hunger from the planet, the world community needs to reform the institutional and political structures that restrict the access of people to food.

Thus, the Church addresses population issues in the context of its teaching on human life, of just development, of care for the environment, and of respect for the freedom of married couples to decide voluntarily on the number and spacing of births. In keeping with these values, and out of respect for cultural norms, it continues to oppose coercive methods of population control and programs that bias decisions through incentives or disincentives. Respect for nature ought to encourage policies that promote natural family planning and true responsible parenthood rather than coercive population control programs or incentives for birth control that violate cultural and religious norms and Catholic teaching.

Finally, we are charged with restoring the integrity of all creation. We must care for all God's creatures, especially the most vulnerable. How, then, can we protect endangered species and at the same time be callous to the unborn, the elderly, or disabled persons? Is not abortion also a sin against creation? If we turn our backs on our own unborn children, can we truly expect that nature will receive respectful treatment at our hands? The care of the earth will not be advanced by the destruction of human life at any stage of development. As Pope John Paul II has said, "protecting the environment is first of all the right to live and the protection of life" (October 16, 1991 homily at Quiaba, Mato Grosso, Brazil).

I. A Web of Life

These themes drawn from Catholic social teaching are linked to our efforts to share this teaching in other contexts, especially in our pastoral letters on peace and economic justice and in our statements on food and agriculture. Clearly, war represents a serious threat to the environment, as the darkened skies and oil soaked beaches of Kuwait clearly remind us. The pursuit of peace—lasting peace based on justice—ought to be an environmental priority because the earth itself bears the wounds and scars of war. Likewise, our efforts to defend the dignity and rights of the poor and of workers, to use the strength of our market economy to meet basic human needs, and to press for greater national and global economic justice are clearly linked to efforts to preserve and sustain the earth. These are not distinct and separate issues but complementary challenges. We need to help build bridges among the peace, justice, and environmental agendas and constituencies.

IV. Theological and Pastoral Concerns

Today's crises in global ecology demand concerted and creative thought and effort on the part of all of us: scientists, political leaders, business people, workers, lawyers, farmers, communicators, and citizens generally. As moral teachers, we intend to lift up the moral and ethical dimensions of these issues. We find much to affirm in and learn from the environmental movement: its devotion to nature, its recognition of limits and connections, its urgent appeal for sustainable and ecologically sound policies. We share considerable common ground in the concern for the earth, and we have much work to do together. But there may also be some areas of potential confusion and conflict with some who share this common concern for the earth. We offer some brief comments on three of these concerns in the hope that they will contribute to a constructive dialogue on how we can best work together.

A. The Creator and Creation

Nature shares in God's goodness, and contemplation of its beauty and richness raises our hearts and minds to God. St. Paul hinted at a theology of creation when he proclaimed to the Athenians, the Creator who "made from one the whole human race to dwell on the entire surface of the earth, and he fixed and ordered the seasons and the boundaries of their regions, so that people might seek God, even perhaps grope for him, though indeed he is not far from any of us" (Acts 17:26-27). Through the centuries, Catholic theologians and philosophers, like St. Paul before them, continue to search for God in reasoning about the created world.

Our Catholic faith continues to affirm the goodness of the natural world. The sacramental life of the Church depends on created goods: water, oil, bread, and wine. Likewise, the Western mystical tradition has taught Christians how to find God dwelling in created things and laboring and loving through them.

Nonetheless, Christian theology also affirms the limits of all God's creatures. God, the Source of all that is, is actively present in all creation, but God also surpasses all created things. We profess the ancient faith of God's people.

Hear O Israel! The LORD our God is LORD alone! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength (Dt 6:4-5; Mk 12:29-30).

An ordered love for creation, therefore, is ecological without being ecocentric. We can and must care for the earth without mistaking it for the ultimate object of our devotion. A Christian love of the natural

world, as St. Francis showed us, can restrain grasping and wanton human behavior and help mightily to preserve and nurture all that God has made. We believe that faith in a good and loving God is a compelling source of passionate and enduring care for all creation.

B. Human Reason and Invention

Guided by the Spirit of God, the future of the earth lies in human hands. To maintain landscapes in integrity, to safeguard endangered species, to preserve remaining wilderness, to ensure the feeding of a hungry world will require much human decision, social cooperation, experimentation, and invention. To restore the purity of air and water, to halt the loss of farmland, to sustain ecological diversity in plant and animal life, concerted human action will be needed over many decades. To avert further depletion of the ozone layer, to check the production of greenhouse gases, and to redress the effects of global warming will require unprecedented collaboration and commitment among the nations of the earth. Even as humanity's mistakes are at the root of earth's travail today, human talents and invention can and must assist in its rebirth and contribute to human development.

Incontestably, people need to exhibit greater respect for nature than they have for some centuries, but we will also need to apply human reason to find remedies for nature's ills. Scientific research and technological innovation must accompany religious and moral responses to environmental challenges. Reverence for nature must be combined with scientific learning. In a Catholic worldview, there is no necessary clash between an environmentally responsible morality and an active application of human reason and science. Problematic uses of technology provide no excuse to retreat into prescientific attitudes toward nature. The ecological crisis heightens our awareness of the need for new approaches to scientific research and technology. Many indigenous technologies can teach us much. Such technologies are more compatible with the ecosystem, are more available to poor persons, and are more sustainable for the entire community.

C. Christian Love

At the heart of the Christian life lies the love of neighbor. The ecological crisis, as Pope John Paul II has urged, challenges us to extend our love to future generations and to the flourishing of all earth's creatures. But neither our duties to future generations nor our tending of the garden entrusted to our care ought to diminish our love for the present members of the human family, especially the poor and the disadvantaged. Both impoverished peoples and an imperiled planet demand our committed service.

Christian love draws us to serve the weak and vulnerable among us. We are called to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to shelter the homeless. We are also summoned to restore the land; to provide clean, safe water to drink and unpolluted air to breathe; to preserve endangered species; to protect wild places; and to help the poor help themselves. We ought to remember that Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of the environmental movement, tamed wolves and preached to the birds only after a long novitiate in which he ministered to outcasts and lepers.

Christian love forbids choosing between people and the planet. It urges us to work for an equitable and sustainable future in which all peoples can share in the bounty of the earth and in which the earth itself is protected from predatory use. The common good invites regions of the country to share burdens equitably in such areas as toxic and nuclear waste disposal and water distribution and to work together to reduce and eliminate waste which threatens health and environmental quality. It also invites us to explore alternatives in which our poor brothers and sisters will share with the rest of us in the banquet of life, at the same time that we preserve and restore the earth, which sustains us.

V. God's Stewards and Co-Creators

As others have pointed out, we are the first generation to see our planet from space—to see so clearly its beauty, limits, and fragility. Modern communication technology helps us to see more clearly than ever the impact of carelessness, ignorance, greed, neglect, and war on the earth.

Today, humanity is at a crossroads. Having read the signs of the times, we can either ignore the harm we see and witness further damage, or we can take up our responsibilities to the Creator and creation with renewed courage and commitment.

The task set before us is unprecedented, intricate, complex. No single solution will be adequate to the task. To live in balance with the finite resources of the planet, we need an unfamiliar blend of restraint and innovation. We shall be required to be genuine stewards of nature and thereby co-creators of a new human world. This will require both new attitudes and new actions.

A. New Attitudes

For believers, our faith is tested by our concern and care for creation. Within our tradition are important resources and values that can help us assess problems and shape constructive solutions. In addition to the themes we have already outlined from our social teaching, the traditional virtues of prudence, humility, and temperance are indispensable elements of a new environmental ethic. Recognition of the reality of sin and failure as well as the opportunity for forgiveness and reconciliation can help us face up to our environmental responsibilities. A new sense of the limits and risks of fallible human judgments ought to mark the decisions of policy makers as they act on complicated global issues with necessarily imperfect knowledge. Finally, as we face the challenging years ahead, we must all rely on the preeminent Christian virtues of faith, hope, and love to sustain us and direct us.

There are hopeful signs: public concern is growing; some public policy is shifting; and private behavior is beginning to change. From broader participation in recycling to negotiating international treaties, people are searching for ways to make a difference on behalf of the environment.

More people seem ready to recognize that the industrialized world's overconsumption has contributed the largest share to the degradation of the global environment. Also encouraging is the growing conviction that development is more qualitative than quantitative, that it consists more in improving the quality of life than in increasing consumption. What is now needed is the will to make the changes in public policy, as well as in life-style, that will be needed to arrest, reverse, and prevent environmental decay and to pursue the goal of sustainable, equitable development for all. The overarching moral issue is to achieve during the twenty-first century a just and sustainable world. From a scientific point of view, this seems possible. But the new order can only be achieved through the persevering exercise of moral responsibility on the part of individuals, voluntary organizations, governments, and transnational agencies.

In the Catholic community, as we have pointed out, there are many signs of increased discussion, awareness, and action on environment. We have offered these reflections in the hope that they will contribute to a broader dialogue in our Church and society about the moral dimensions of ecology and about the links between social justice and ecology, between environment and development. We offer these reflections not to endorse a particular policy agenda nor to step onto some current bandwagon, but to meet our responsibilities as pastors and teachers who see the terrible consequences of

environmental neglect and who believe our faith calls us to help shape a creative and effective response.

B. New Actions

This statement is only a first step in fashioning an ongoing response to this challenge. We invite the Catholic community to join with us and others of good will in a continuing effort to understand and act on the moral and ethical dimensions of the environmental crisis:

- We ask *scientists, environmentalists, economists, and other experts* to continue to help us understand the challenges we face and the steps we need to take. Faith is not a substitute for facts; the more we know about the problems we face, the better we can respond.
- We invite *teachers and educators* to emphasize, in their classrooms and curricula, a love for God's creation, a respect for nature, and a commitment to practices and behavior that bring these attitudes into the daily lives of their students and themselves.
- We remind *parents* that they are the first and principal teachers of children. It is from parents that children will learn love of the earth and delight in nature. It is at home that they develop the habits of self-control, concern, and care that lie at the heart of environmental morality.
- We call on *theologians, scripture scholars, and ethicists* to help explore, deepen, and advance the insights of our Catholic tradition and its relation to the environment and other religious perspectives on these matters. We especially call upon Catholic scholars to explore the relationship between this tradition's emphasis upon the dignity of the human person and our responsibility to care for all of God's creation.
- We ask *business leaders and representatives of workers* to make the protection of our common environment a central concern in their activities and to collaborate for the common good and the protection of the earth. We especially encourage pastors and parish leaders to give greater attention to the extent and urgency of the environmental crisis in preaching, teaching, pastoral outreach, and action, at the parish level and through ecumenical cooperation in the local community.
- We ask the *members of our Church* to examine our life-styles, behaviors, and policies—individually and institutionally—to see how we contribute to the destruction or neglect of the environment and how we might assist in its protection and restoration. We also urge *celebrants and liturgy committees* to incorporate themes into prayer and worship that emphasize our responsibility to protect all of God's creation and to organize prayerful celebrations of creation on feast days honoring St. Francis and St. Isidore.
- We ask *environmental advocates* to join us in building bridges between the quest for justice and the pursuit of peace and concern for the earth. We ask that the poor and vulnerable at home and abroad be accorded a special and urgent priority in all efforts to care for our environment.
- We urge *policy makers and public officials* to focus more directly on the ethical dimensions of environmental policy and on its relation to development, to seek the common good, and to resist short-term pressures in order to meet our long-term responsibility to future generations. At the

very minimum, we need food and energy policies that are socially just, environmentally benign, and economically efficient.

- As *citizens*, each of us needs to participate in this debate over how our nation best protects our ecological heritage, limits pollution, allocates environmental costs, and plans for the future. We need to use our voices and votes to shape a nation more committed to the universal common good and an ethic of environmental solidarity.

All of us need both a spiritual and a practical vision of stewardship and co-creation that guides our choices as consumers, citizens, and workers. We need, in the now familiar phrase, to "think globally and act locally," finding the ways in our own situation to express a broader ethic of genuine solidarity.

C. Call to Conversion

The environmental crisis of our own day constitutes an exceptional call to conversion. As individuals, as institutions, as a people, we need a change of heart to save the planet for our children and generations yet unborn. So vast are the problems, so intertwined with our economy and way of life, that nothing but a wholehearted and ever more profound turning to God, the Maker of Heaven and Earth, will allow us to carry out our responsibilities as faithful stewards of God's creation.

Only when believers look to values of the Scriptures, honestly admit their limitations and failings, and commit their selves to common action on behalf of the land and the wretched of the earth will we be ready to participate fully in resolving this crisis.

D. A Word of Hope

A just and sustainable society and world are not an optional ideal, but a moral and practical necessity. Without justice, a sustainable economy will be beyond reach. Without an ecologically responsible world economy, justice will be unachievable. To accomplish either is an enormous task; together they seem overwhelming. But "[a]ll things are possible" to those who hope in God (Mk 10:27). Hope is the virtue at the heart of a Christian environmental ethic. Hope gives us the courage, direction, and energy required for this arduous common endeavor.

In the bleak years of Britain's industrial revolution, Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote of urban decay wrought by industry and of Christian hope for nature's revival. His words capture the condition of today's world as it awaits redemption from ecological neglect:

And all is seared with trade;
bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge
and shares man's smell:
the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel,
being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent:
There lives the dearest
freshness deep down things;

.....

Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast
and with ah!
bright wings.

Saving the planet will demand long and sometimes sacrificial commitment. It will require continual revision of our political habits, restructuring economic institutions, reshaping society, and nurturing global community. But we can proceed with hope because, as at the dawn of creation, so today the Holy Spirit breathes new life into all earth's creatures. Today, we pray with new conviction and concern for all God's creation:

Send forth thy Spirit, Lord
and renew the face of the earth.

This bishops' statement is the result of a process that began in June 1990 at the joint meeting of the USCC Committees on International Policy and on Domestic Policy. At that time the committees responded to concerns, raised by several bishops in the United States and by bishops' conferences in developing countries, about the religious and moral dimensions of the environmental crisis. After a year and a half of study and consultation, the bishops adopted this statement, *Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching*, at their November 1991 meeting. The statement is authorized for publication by the undersigned.

Monsignor Robert N. Lynch
General Secretary
NCCB/USCC

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