

GRIST

Diocese of New Ulm Social Concerns Office March, 2010

from } **If You Want to Cultivate Peace,
Protect Creation**

Pope Benedict XVI's

2010 *World Day of Peace* Message

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/index_en.htm

Man's inhumanity to man has given rise to numerous threats to peace and to authentic and integral human development – wars, international and regional conflicts, acts of terrorism, and violations of human rights. Yet no less troubling are the threats arising from the neglect – if not downright misuse – of the earth and the natural goods that God has given us. For this reason, it is imperative that mankind renew and strengthen “that covenant between human beings and the environment, which should mirror the creative love of God, from whom we come and towards whom we are journeying.”

The environment must be seen as God's gift to all people, and the use we make of it entails a shared responsibility for all humanity, especially the poor and future generations.

Can we remain indifferent before the problems associated with such realities as climate change, desertification, the deterioration and loss of productivity in vast agricultural areas, the pollution of rivers and aquifers, the loss of biodiversity, the increase of natural catastrophes and the deforestation of equatorial and tropical regions? Can we disregard the growing phenomenon of “environmental refugees,” people who are forced by the degradation of their natural habitat to forsake it – and often their possessions as well – in order to face the dangers and uncertainties of forced displacement? Can we remain impassive in the face of actual and potential conflicts involving access to natural resources? All these are issues with a profound impact on the exercise of human rights, such as the right to life, food, health and development.

Our present crises – be they economic, food-related, environmental or social – are ultimately also moral crises, and all of them are interrelated. They require us to rethink the path which we are traveling together. Specifically, they call for a lifestyle marked by sobriety and solidarity, with new rules and forms of engagement, one which focuses confidently and courageously on strategies that actually work, while decisively rejecting those that have failed.

The goods of creation belong to humanity as a whole. Yet the current pace of environmental exploitation is seriously endangering the supply of certain natural resources not only for the present generation, but above all for generations yet to come. It is not hard to see that environmental degradation is often due to the lack of far-sighted official policies or to the pursuit of myopic economic interests, which then, tragically, become a serious threat to creation. To combat this phenomenon, economic activity needs to consider the fact that “every economic decision has a moral consequence” and thus show increased respect for the environment. When making use of natural resources, we should be concerned for their protection and consider the cost entailed – environmentally and socially – as an essential part of the overall expenses incurred.

A greater sense of intergenerational solidarity is urgently needed. Future generations cannot be saddled with the cost of our use of common environmental resources. Natural resources should be used in such a way that immediate benefits do not have a negative impact on living creatures, human and not, present and future; that the protection of private property does not conflict with the universal destination of goods; that human activity does not compromise the fruitfulness of the earth, for the benefit of people now and in the future.

There is also an urgent moral need for a renewed sense of *intragenerational solidarity*, especially in relationships between developing countries and highly industrialized countries. It is important to

acknowledge that among the causes of the present ecological crisis is the historical responsibility of the industrialized countries. Yet the less developed countries, and emerging countries in particular, are not exempt from their own responsibilities with regard to creation, for the duty of gradually adopting effective environmental measures and policies is incumbent upon all.

To be sure, among the basic problems which the international community has to address is that of energy resources and the development of joint and sustainable strategies to satisfy the energy needs of the present and future generations. This means that technologically advanced societies must be prepared to encourage more sober lifestyles, while reducing their energy consumption and improving its efficiency. At the same time there is a need to encourage research into, and utilization of, forms of energy with lower impact on the environment and “a world-wide redistribution of energy resources, so that countries lacking those resources can have access to them.”

The ecological crisis offers an historic opportunity to develop a common plan of action aimed at orienting the model of global development towards greater respect for creation and for an integral human development inspired by the values proper to charity in truth. I would advocate the adoption of a model of development based on the centrality of the human person, on the promotion and sharing of the common good, on responsibility, on a realization of our need for a changed life-style, and on prudence, the virtue which tells us what needs to be done today in view of what might happen tomorrow.

Encouragement needs to be given to research into effective ways of exploiting the immense potential of solar energy. Similar attention also needs to be paid to the world-wide problem of water and to the global water cycle system, which is of prime importance for life on earth and whose stability could be seriously jeopardized by climate change. Suitable strategies for rural development centered on small farmers and their families should be explored, as well as the implementation of appropriate policies for the management of forests, for waste disposal and for strengthening the linkage between combating climate change and overcoming poverty.

It is becoming more and more evident that the issue of environmental degradation challenges us to examine our life-style and the prevailing models of

consumption and production, which are often unsustainable from a social, environmental and even economic point of view. We are all responsible for the protection and care of the environment. This responsibility knows no boundaries. In accordance with the *principle of subsidiarity* it is important for everyone to be committed at his or her proper level, working to overcome the prevalence of particular interests.

The Church has a responsibility towards creation, and she considers it her duty to exercise that responsibility in public life, in order to protect earth, water and air as gifts of God the Creator meant for everyone, and above all to save mankind from the danger of self-destruction.

The book of nature is one and indivisible; it includes not only the environment but also individual, family and social ethics. Our duties towards the environment flow from our duties towards the person, considered both individually and in relation to others.

Nor must we forget the very significant fact that many people experience peace and tranquility, renewal and reinvigoration, when they come into close contact with the beauty and harmony of nature. There exists a certain reciprocity: as we care for creation, we realize that God, through creation, cares for us. On the other hand, a correct understanding of the relationship between man and the environment will not end by absolutizing nature or by considering it more important than the human person.

In the light of divine Revelation and in fidelity to the Church's Tradition, Christians have their own contribution to make. They contemplate the cosmos and its marvels in light of the creative work of the Father and the redemptive work of Christ, who by his death and resurrection has reconciled with God “all things, whether on earth or in heaven” (Col 1:20). Christ, crucified and risen, has bestowed his Spirit of holiness upon mankind, to guide the course of history in anticipation of that day when, with the glorious return of the Savior, there will be “new heavens and a new earth” (2 Pet 3:13), in which justice and peace will dwell for ever. Protecting the natural environment in order to build a world of peace is thus a duty incumbent upon each and all. It is an urgent challenge, one to be faced with renewed and concerted commitment; it is also a providential opportunity to hand down to coming generations the prospect of a better future for all.