



Protecting our Common Home

IYCS Global Campaign 2015-2019 – Theological Reflection, June 2017

Are Christians environment friendly ?

Dear friends in Christ,

In this month of June, I would like to focus my reflection on the environment; our common Home. The **5th of June** is celebrated annually since 1973 as the World environment day, also known as the **Environment Day** or Eco Day. It has been one of the great annual events for years which is being celebrated worldwide by the people aiming to protect the unique and life nurturing Nature. The celebration is aimed at raising the global awareness about the importance of the healthy and green environment in the human lives, to solve the environmental issues by implementing some positive environmental actions as well as to make aware to the common public worldwide **that everyone is responsible for saving his environment** and not only somebody, government or organizations working for it. We have decided to put a particular attention in this year and in the next couple of years as Environment happen to be one of the major concerns of our **Global Campaign 2015-2019 “Protecting our Common Home”**.

In 1967, Lynn White, Jr., claimed that the Judeo-Christian tradition was the cause of our ecological crisis. He stated that, “God planned all of this explicitly for man’s benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man’s purposes” was Christian attitude toward God’s creation.

God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will

be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground— everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.”(Gen 1 :29-30)

Francis Schaeffer, a Christian apologist responded to him- “The Christian is called upon to exhibit this dominion, but exhibit it rightly; treating the things as having value in itself, exercising dominion without being destructive.” Dominion in this context has earlier been interpreted by John Calvin in 1554 also had dominion to mean a responsible care and keeping that does not neglect, injure, abuse, degrade, dissipate, corrupt, mar, or ruin the earth. (1)

Do we people have the right to pollute the earth? Is it justified for people to pollute and kill livestock?

To answer these questions, we need to look to the beginning of the Bible – « *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth* » (Gen 1 : 1) Scientists might disagree with the biblical account, but it expresses three great truths about God, human beings and the natural world.

First, everything God made -- forces of nature, rocks, plants, animals and people -- was made to be good. « *God saw all that he had made, and it was **VERY GOOD*** » (Gen 1 :31) God created the world, holds everything together, and reconciles all things through Jesus Christ.

Since the days of the early church, for centuries prior to the Incarnation, God had also been affirmed as Creator. Since “the



earth is the Lord's," humanity's responsibility to "serve and keep" God's creation had been part of the belief and action of God's people.

In reality, the world is not always found to be good: people are often bad. Leaving things die and nature can be cruel. Many parts of Creation work together harmoniously but there is also discord. We believe that the original goodness of the world has been tarnished by sin.

Pope Benedict XVI says, "In nature, the believer recognises the wonderful result of God's creative activity... The environment is God's gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility..." We should respect "the intrinsic balance of creation". In other words, we should not engage in "reckless exploitation" of the air, water or land or needless disruption of the natural world. (Caritas in Veritate 48)

Pope Francis in the encyclical « Laudato Si » calls for the sustainability of God's creation with our concrete human actions.

Second, we have a special role in Creation. We were created with a difference: in "the image and likeness of God" (Gen. 1.26). God gives people authority over the plants and the animals. There is always room for debate, but there is no justification for either an extreme worship of nature or a total disregard of it.

Genesis 2:15 says: "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and to keep it." Serving and keeping creation,

not oppressive domination, is the biblical idea.

Third, human life should not be separated from either God or the rest of Creation. The first man's body was made "from the dust of the ground" and God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (Gen.2.7). Hence, we are all both earthly and heavenly.

Pope Benedict says, "when 'human ecology' is respected within society, environmental ecology also benefits." (Caritas in Veritate 51) In other words, the goodness of human life, from conception to natural death, is part of the goodness of nature.

The responsibility that people have to nature is not just to nature itself or to the creating God, but also towards all people who require nature's bounty: "towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole". The powerful of the world should not waste or greedily take more than their fair share of the gifts of God.



Global climate change: The average global temperature is increasing at a rate and by an amount unprecedented in the history of humankind. There is now little doubt that it is caused by injecting carbon dioxide into the atmosphere from burning fossil fuels – oil, gas and coal. A consequence is the likely increase in extreme weather events. The effects are drastic and already the number of environmental refugees is estimated as 20 million, exceeding those from war and political repression.

International perspective : We live on a planet of finite size and resources and what we do in our own backyard has a global impact. Yet those who suffer most from the consequences of

climate change have no much say in our contributing activities.

National perspective : National policies that require sacrifice by the populace, can only be implemented if there is broad acceptance of them by the electorate. This is where we, Christians can play our part in lobbying for change. That radical change is possible - as slavery was abolished largely due to a campaign by committed Christians. Government could lead by adjusting the distribution of taxation to change behaviour and improve our living environment.

Each Christian community, each YCS cells or section are encouraged to take seriously the sharing of resources to create a low energy footprint. Of all people, Christians ought to understand that the resources entrusted to them are gifts from God, and should be used for the common good of all. As individuals, we encourage you to strengthen this culture of solidarity while doing away with the culture of waste, greed, and other practices that advances destructive personal interest above the common good



The **Catholic Social teachings** offer a developing and distinctive perspective on environmental issues. The following themes are integral dimensions of our ecological responsibility:

- God-centred and sacramental view of the universe, which bases human accountability for the fate of the

earth;

- consistent respect for human life, which extends to respect for all creation;
- world view 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.

Conclusion: As Christians, we should continue to be a model of ethical responsibility and care towards creation and others to the global community.. Those who live in the high-income industrialised nations have a particular responsibility in their stewardship, an imperative to care for those elsewhere in the world adversely affected by climate change. 'From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.'(Lk 12 :48)

The time has come for us to carefully seek to learn all that the Bible teaches us about the Creator, creation, and stewardship of His world. We must discover what creation teaches us about its God-given order and the principles by which it works. We must not selfishly keep the good news to ourselves. We must proclaim. We should so behave on earth that our testimony to our Creator is clear and that heaven will be our reward.

(1) *The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis*, Lynn White Jr. 1967.

(2) *Pollution and the death of man*, Francis Schaeffer, 1970

Courtesy – Article - *Christians and the Environment and Catholic Social Teaching from United States Catholic Conference*.

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