

Conservation and the Environment

St. Paul says of the Gentiles: For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made.

And St. Augustine issues this challenge: Question the beauty of the earth, question the beauty of the sea, question the beauty of the air distending and diffusing itself, question the beauty of the sky...question all these realities. All respond: "See, we are beautiful." Their beauty is a profession. These beauties are subject to change. Who made them if not the Beautiful One who is not subject to change? CCC 32.

"The environment is God's gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole." *Caritas in Veritate* n.48.



"The Church has a responsibility towards creation and she must assert this responsibility in the public sphere. In so doing, she must defend not only earth, water and air as gifts of creation that belong to everyone. She must above all protect mankind from self-destruction. There is need for what might be called a human ecology, correctly understood. The deterioration of nature is in fact closely connected to the culture that shapes human coexistence: when "human ecology" is respected within society, environmental ecology also benefits. Just as human virtues are interrelated, such that the weakening of one places others at risk, so the ecological system is based on respect for a plan that affects both the health of society and its good relationship with nature.

In order to protect nature, it is not enough to intervene with economic incentives or deterrents; not even an apposite education is sufficient. These are important steps, but *the decisive issue is the overall moral tenor of society*. If there is a lack of respect for the right to life and to a natural death, if human conception, gestation and birth are made artificial, if human embryos are sacrificed to research, the conscience of society ends up losing the concept of human ecology and, along with it, that of environmental ecology. It is contradictory to insist that future generations respect the natural environment when our educational systems and laws do not help them to respect themselves. The book of nature is one and indivisible: it takes in not only the environment but also life, sexuality, marriage, the family, social relations: in a word, integral human development. Our duties towards the environment are linked to our duties towards the human person, considered in himself and in relation to others. It would be wrong to uphold one set of duties while trampling on the other. Herein lies a grave contradiction in our mentality and practice today: one which demeans the person, disrupts the environment and damages society." *Caritas in Veritate* n. 51.

Church Documents:

Caritas in Veritate, Pope Benedict XVI (2009), p. 48-52. Available http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate_en.html.

Renewing the Earth, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (1991). Available <http://nccbuscc.org/sdwp/ejp/bishopsstatement.shtml>.

Centesimus Annus, John Paul II (1991), p. 37. Available http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_01051991_centesimus-annus_en.html.

Catholic Websites:

“How to Vote Catholic: The Environment,” CatholiCity/ Available <http://www.catholicity.com/vote/environment.html>.

Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha Conservation Center. Available <http://conservation.catholic.org>.

Catholic Coalition on Climate Change. Available <http://www.catholicsandclimatechange.org/>.

Articles:

Bishop Stephen Blaire, “Good Sense, Good Air: While we live we are responsible to the Lord” (November 2011). Available http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/environment/upload/Good-Sense-Good-Air-November-7-2011_FINAL.pdf

John Allen, Jr. “Catholic Environmentalism: Green teachings, initiatives take hold among Catholics worldwide,” *National Catholic Reporter* (August 2008). Available <http://ncronline.org/node/1503>

William Skylstad, “Stewards of Creation: A Catholic approach to climate change” (2009). Available at http://www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article_id=11600.

Dates to Note

April 22 is considered Earth Day.

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