

STATEMENT ON "COMPANIONS IN CREATION"

January 1, 1991

"The commitment of believers to a healthy environment for everyone stems directly from their belief in God the Creator." (John Paul II, *Peace With God the Creator: Peace With All Creation*. January 1, 1990)

The Bible tells us that all creation is **good**. In six days God created light, the sky, water, the earth, vegetation, plants, fish, birds, and men and women. After the six days, "God saw everything he had made and indeed it was very good." (Gen 1:31) Creation is a **gift** from God: "O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all: The earth is full of your creatures." (Psalm 104:24)

Through Christ all of the elements of creation are related: "All things were created through him and for him." (Col 1:16) "All things came to be through him." (Jn 1:3) The letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians teach that Christ is our peace (Eph. 2:16) reconciling Jew and Greek and bringing harmony to all creation. "Through him are reconciled all things whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross." (Col. 1:20) The deepest reality of things is that they are from and for God. All creation is gathered into one in Christ.

Human beings are the apex of creation because they are made in the image and likeness of God. (Gen 1:26) God has entrusted the care of all other creatures to human beings: "Have dominion over...all the living things that move on the earth." (Gen 1:28)

This dominion is not a power to exploit or use wantonly. Rather it is a stewardship, a caring cooperation in creation. "It was the Creator's will that man should communicate with nature as an intelligent and noble 'master' and 'guardian', and not as a heedless 'exploiter' and 'destroyer'." (*Pope John Paul II, Redemptor Hominis, #15*) We, along with the other Bishops of the United States, pointed out that the resources of the earth have been given to us by God for the benefit of all for all time.

Human stewardship, however, has been thoughtless and careless. Oil has been spilled into the ocean, smothering marine life. Pesticides, raw sewage, toxic wastes, have polluted our lakes and rivers. Unregulated real estate development has depleted our grasslands and overtaxed our aquifers and our supply of surface water. Once biologically rich bays, estuaries, and lagoons are decaying.

The use of refrigerants and aerosol cans projects into the atmosphere a chemical which could ultimately destroy the ozone, the fragile shield that protects the earth from being scorched by solar radiation. The burning of fossil fuels such as coal and oil emits carbon dioxide which causes the ozone to trap heat on the earth (greenhouse effect), resulting in a dangerous increase of the earth's temperature. Chemicals in the air cause life-giving rainfall to become harmful acid. Nuclear accidents at Three Mile Island and Chernobyl warn of the possible cosmic disaster of nuclear warfare.

As well as being stewards of creation, human beings are profoundly related to non-human creation because, like all things, they are creatures made by God. Human beings are fellow-creatures and companions with all creation. The common good involves all creation.

Because of creation by God and the incarnation of Jesus Christ, all creatures are "sacramental". Every creature contains some memory of the Creator, some "revelation of God." As God's children, human beings

are called upon in a special way to love one another but also to have a strong sense of the sacredness of all creation and to have a sense of solidarity and companionship with all creation.

As companions in creation we must act in unity with our Creator and with each other to prevent further damage to our environment and further loss of our resources. For all people, preservation of the environment is a fundamental and critical issue of our time. Pope John Paul II places the situation facing humanity in its true perspective when he says, "The right to a safe environment is ever more insistently presented today as a right that must be included in an updated Charter of Human Rights." (*Jan. 1, 1990, World Peace*)

Nature, understood as non-human, is not merchandise to be used and discarded as an isolated thing. Rather it is part of a life bearing and life sustaining organism or system. Injury to any part has repercussions on the whole. There is an inherent punishment for destructive action against nature and punishment falls upon the innocent as well as the guilty. Nature has a value in itself, but it also has an instrumental value as the support of human life and well being.

Concern for nature must include concern for social justice. It is not right for developed nations to use a disproportionate amount of the world's resources or energies at the expense of less technically advanced nations or at the expense of future generations. It is unjust for a nation with technology to make unfair use of another country's resources.

Human beings are part of the environment, not separate from it. There is need to employ human intelligence and inventiveness in order to secure a balance between ecological concerns and the need for employment, just wages, decent living conditions, economic advancement.

Related to our ecological concerns is our Christian consistent ethic of human life. We are obliged by the teaching and example of Christ to have special concern for the unborn, the poor, the oppressed, the defenseless, and those who are vulnerable because of physical, social, or economic disabilities.

In our statement *Justice and Equality in Florida* we said, "As disciples of Christ, each of us is called to a deep personal conversion and to actions in behalf of justice and to participate in the transformation of the World." (Nov. 2, 1989) Conversion begins with an aroused consciousness of the life and death seriousness of environmental concerns and of our individual and corporate responsibility. Conversion calls for commitment to respect the relatedness of all creation and commitment to nurture rather than waste or destroy.

Catholic teaching has long cautioned against lifestyles that place material goods and consumption ahead of spiritual values and ethical relationships. The pursuit of self-gratification on an excessive level places a burden on our individual lives and family relationships, on our natural resources, and on the environment. It is especially important that we evaluate our consumptive habits and reorient ourselves to more frugal, nurturing and caring lifestyles.

To proclaim and demonstrate the value of environmental responsibilities, we are all called on to act. As individuals and in families, we must modify our behavior so as to improve the ways in which we impact on and interact with our environment. "Recycle", "reuse" and "reduce" must become our environmental watchwords. Parents must educate their children to develop a caring attitude toward all of creation. Parishes, dioceses and all church institutions must review and evaluate the ways in which their policies and activities affect the environment. Programs should be developed throughout the church to improve environmental action, especially through catechesis.

Because of the nature of many environmental problems, corrections will often require governmental action. Political action, therefore, is necessary. We urge all Catholics to use the democratic processes to make their representatives aware of environmental problems and of their own concern and determination to see these problems corrected.

Our responsibility to both the present and the future is immense. The decision relating to the environment and the actions taken as a result of those decisions will often require difficult choices. We are

called, as Christians to make those choices. We must assume this responsibility as an act of selfless love for all life and for the environment that sustains all life. "May the glory of the Lord endure forever; may the Lord be glad in His works!" (Psalm 104:31)

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