

**Sixth Plenary Assembly: Workshop Discussion Guide****THE CHRISTIAN VOCATION TO PROMOTE  
JUSTICE, PEACE AND THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION**

by  
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**CHAPTER I**

The following parable captures some aspects of the present development and ecological crisis which I will address in this text. It highlights the inability of many people, especially those in leadership roles in institutions, to deal with the widening gap between rich and poor and with the rampant destruction of the environment in an effective and systematic way.<sup>1</sup>

**A Contemporary Parable**

A group of people were invited to attend a banquet in a beautiful medieval castle situated in a magnificent courtyard. It was a splendid feast with profusion of sumptuous dishes, delicious range of wines and other drinks, superb service and an excellent orchestra to entertain the guests as they ate. The food was so sumptuous and the drink so delicious that the guests simply could not get enough. They continued to gorge themselves long past the point of satiation. As the night wore on, instead of ending the meal, relaxing and going home, the revelers became more and more intent on securing additional helpings of the mouth-watering food.

Their demands became so voracious that all the food was consumed. The master of the house, in order to avoid embarrassment, sent out his servants, backed by his militia, to collect more food from the poor inhabitants in the surrounding countryside. Fuel to cook the food also ran out; the cooks ordered some servants to begin chipping away at the timber pillars that supported the roof in order to get firewood to continue cooking.

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After a while some pillars began to sag a little and cracks appeared in the ceiling. But the servants and the banqueters were so absorbed in the meal that they were completely unaware of the long-term implications of what they were doing. They had no time to consider that, unless they stopped hacking at the supporting pillars, the ceiling would eventually come crashing down on their heads. Needless to say, they did not give a thought to the hundreds of servants living in the castle compound who would also perish if the castle collapsed.

The din, buzz and activity in the kitchen and dining hall were electrifying. People were milling around the cooking stoves, shouting orders for more food and eating with relish. Yet not everyone was caught up in the frenzy. A small number of people stood by the doors, with neither plates nor glasses in their hands. Some of the protestors who were members of human rights and justice groups denounced the diners. They pointed out that the heavy cost of the meal was being borne by the poor in the surrounding countryside. Others protestors, sensitive to the ecological implications, were conscious that the beams were already sagging and that a tragedy was imminent. They implored the diners to end the meal and thus avert the disaster. A few of those eating would occasionally stop to listen to their heartfelt pleas; they might even cast a fleeting glance towards the ceiling, but as soon as a waiter with food came close, they would lose interest and join in the scramble for more. The majority of those who were celebrating, however, did not take any notice, at all. They were simply so engrossed in the meal that nothing else really mattered.

### **The Obsession with Economic Growth is Improverishing the Majority of the Peoples of the World and Endangering the Planet**

This discussion guide is an attempt to elucidate some of the issues involved in this parable, and to look at how they are being addressed by the Churches, especially the leadership of the Catholic Church. While my presentation will draw on many experts in the field of development and environment, I am writing from the perspective of a missionary. Between 1969 and 1989 I lived in the Philippines. During that time, I witnessed two trends, both at the national and international level. The first was the impact the modern technological, industrial, consumer, throw-away society was having on the earth, with the destruction of rainforests, soils and marine ecosystems. The second was the increasing gap between rich and poor nations, as well as between rich and poor in individual countries.

Since 1989 I have been coordinator for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation for the Columban Missionary Society. During my visits to countries in Asia and Latin American I have seen similar trends, or heard about them from my fellow missionaries. The paper will attempt to show

that the demands which are made by our modern affluent way of living are impoverishing the poor. The constant teaching of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures and of all the Christian Churches is that the goods of this world are meant to sustain all human life on earth.

I will then move on to argue that this same system is also killing the earth itself. I will not, of course, be able to cover all the elements involved in this vast canvas in a comprehensive way. Numerous books have been written and television documentaries have been made in recent years, showing the rampant damage to the planet as a whole and to particular regions on Earth. Some of this material is in my own books, *To Care for the Earth* and *The Greening of the Church*. In this paper I will focus on the fact that modern economic patterns of production, distribution, consumption, trade and development are taxing, and even breaching, the regenerative capacity of the biosphere. This is a very serious indictment, as it entails diminishing life on earth for all future generations of humans and of other creatures. Needless to say, such devastation of the earth is also condemned by the Gospel of Jesus. The thrust of the Gospel of Jesus can be summed up, without distortion, in the text of John 10:10, "I have come that they may have life and have it to the full."<sup>4</sup> Anything that diminishes life sins against this.

My purpose in writing this paper is not merely to describe the pain of the poor and the pain of the earth. It is rather to arouse and focus concern among Christians, so that we can respond to this challenge of the contemporary world in a creative and comprehensive way. I am convinced that moral and religious values can provide individuals and communities with the psychic energy to challenge our present earth-consuming way of life. A truly appropriate religious vision can provide the springboard for that imaginative leap which will be necessary to enable people to design a new, more sustainable culture. In this way of living, the emphasis will need to be more on sharing rather than consumption, long-term needs rather than immediate gratification, and community values and eco-system needs rather than individual profit or aggrandizement. In other words, it will encourage people to share the earth more equitably and to live in a lighter, less destructive way on the earth.

The latter part of the paper will explore how the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth challenge dominant institutions in our society, especially the Catholic Church. Few institutions have coped creatively or adequately with the impact of our worldwide industrial society on the Two-Thirds World of the earth. Yet if abundant life for all is to be attained, then every institution, including religious institutions, must begin to bring ideas about justice, peace and the integrity of creation into the very core of its message as a matter of urgency.

## **First, Second and Third World**

A word about the terminology which is commonly used in development debate may not be out of place. Until recently, for those involved in development work, the world was divided into three groupings — First, Second and Third World. The First World referred to the industrialized countries of Europe, the United States and Canada, Japan, Australia, New Zealand. A few countries like Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong have joined this club within the past decade. Even though Australia and New Zealand are located in the southern hemisphere, and some of the newly industrialized countries are in the tropics, because the majority of industrialized countries are in the Northern hemisphere, this block is often referred to today as the North. To add to the confusion, the elite in the South are often referred to as a North in the South, while the new poor in the North are called the South in the North!

The Second World consisted of the Socialist countries of Eastern Europe, the USSR, China, North Korea and Cuba. With the demise of Marxism, the Second World can now be considered to be on the list of endangered species! Only North Korea, Cuba and, to a lesser extent, the People's Republic of China survive as Marxist, centrally-planned economies.

The Third World, often also referred to as "underdeveloped," included the countries of Africa, Latin America and much of Asia. This block, in more recent times, has been referred to as the South. The term, Third World, was coined in the 1950s in France. It was meant to denote the economic, social and political dependency which still bound the newly-independent countries to their former colonial masters or to other Western economies. The value of the term is that it stresses the systemic and causal relationship between the rich and poor countries. It alerts people to the fact that economic decisions taken in Washington, Tokyo or London have a direct impact on the lives of people thousands of miles away. While Third World is less offensive and more accurate than the term "underdeveloped," it still has major disadvantages. In a hierarchical world it is, after all, third, and last. This is why many people are now prefer the term Two-Thirds World. This term, at least, has the advantage of being more accurate demographically, since two-thirds of the population of the world live there. I will use the term Third World sparingly in this paper. However, there are some situations in which it is almost impossible to avoid using it, for example, when referring to Third World debt.

## **Impoverishing the Poor**

Everyone will admit that the modern, industrial, throw-away society has benefited a number of individuals and groups. It has brought huge profits

and a growing control of world production and markets to multinational corporations and financial institutions. It has brought innumerable comforts and incredible possibilities for consumer choices to the rich and middle class in Northern countries and to the elite in the Two-Thirds world. All these groups add up to about one billion people which is less than one in five of all the people living today. The downside of this international economy, four-fifths of the world's population, has not been served by it and a significant percentage, especially those living in the South, have been impoverished by its operations.

One simple way of judging the success of any economic system is to look at how it provides for the basic needs of people. Every person, for example, needs an adequate intake of nutritious food, adequate clothing, a decent place to live and access to basic education and health care. The present economic system fails to deliver most of the above to even a fraction of the world's population. And the situation is deteriorating. In the early 1980s, the World Bank and the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimated that between 700 million and 1 billion people lived in absolute poverty. Robert McNamara, a former president of the World Bank, described absolute poverty as a condition of life so limited by malnutrition, illiteracy, disease, squalid surroundings, high infant mortality, and low life expectancy as to be beneath any reasonable definition of human dignity.

McNamara was concerned about the world situation in the late 1970s. In 1994 most indicators suggest that poverty has increased dramatically in Sub-Saharan Africa, and to a lesser extent in most of Latin America, and in significant areas of South Asia and South East Asia. The number living in absolute poverty in 1992 stood at 1.2 billion. This included 560 million rural women and millions of children, where a woman is the sole parent.<sup>2</sup> What is more alarming is that, while the percentage of the world's population which is in this category dropped steadily between the 1950s and the 1970s, it began to climb again during the 1980s. In the 1980, for example, the percentage of the world's population living in extreme poverty increased from 22.3% to 23.4%. This increase has taken place, despite all the talk about three decades of development, all the bilateral aid and the activities of the multilateral lending agencies which declare they are committed to reducing world poverty.

### **Rich Get Richer**

Modern development theory and practice assume that economic improvement will take place, if the volume of economic activity is increased. There was even an acceptance of the fact that during the initial stages of "development" there will probably be a concentration of wealth in the

hands of the rich. However, it is claimed that, when the benefits of capital accumulation and growth have reached a certain threshold, significant economic benefits will “trickle down” and enhance the lives of the poor.

Unfortunately, this is not the way things operate in the real world, where politics, economics and ecology meet. What, in fact, happens is that the gap between the rich and poor, on a national and worldwide stage, increases as income distribution becomes more lopsided. In the period between 1965 and 1984 the Gross National Product in many countries increased. The per-capita income for wealthy nations — North America, Europe, Japan — almost tripled. This growth spurt is often held up as an example of how well the system is working. A closer look at the figures tells a different story. The annual per capita increase in the North — \$270 — far outstripped the — \$7 — increase in poorer countries. Furthermore, it is most likely that the \$7 increase did not go to the most needy. Income distribution is often very skewed in the Two-Thirds world. On average the richest 10 per cent, for example, have more than 33 per cent of the income, while the poorest 40 per cent receive only 15 per cent.

Every now and then, a report, or a statistic, or a particularly graphic photo captures the obscurity of the immense difference between the standard of living of the rich and that of the poor. *The Guardian* (December 10, 1993), achieved this with a simple question: “What’s the difference between Tanzania and Goldman Sachs?” The answer to the question is that one is an African country that makes \$2.2 billion per annum and shares it among 25 million people. The other is an investment Bank that made \$2.6 billion profit in 1992 and shares that with 161 people.

### **The Gap is Widening**

It is important to emphasize that this yawning gap has not always existed. According to the Swiss economist Paul Bairoch, the per capita gross national product for “developed” and “underdeveloped” countries in 1750 was more or less similar. In 1930 it had grown to a ratio of 4 to 1, and by 1990, 8 to 1. The tragedy of recent decades is that, despite the fine rhetoric from politicians and multilateral lending agencies about promoting poverty reduction the gap is growing. According to *Human Development Report*, 1992, published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP):

In 1960, the richest 20% of the world’s population had incomes 30 times greater than the poorest 20%. By 1990, the richest 20% were getting 60 times more. And this comparison is based on the distribution between rich and poor countries. Adding to the maldistribution within countries, the richest 20% of the world’s people get at least 150 times more

than the poorest 20%.

During the 1980s the neo-liberal economic policies championed by Britain's Margaret Thatcher and the USA's Ronald Reagan were thrust upon the Third World by both the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). As a result, the share of global wealth enjoyed by the Third World fell from 22 per cent to 18 per cent.<sup>3</sup> As of 1990, the top 20 per cent Northern minority enjoyed 82.7 per cent of the world's gross national product; 81.9 per cent of world trade; 94.6 per cent of all commercial lending; 80.6 per cent of all domestic savings and 94 per cent of all research and development.<sup>4</sup>

### Third World Debt

Third World debt, which amounted to US\$1,700 billion in March 1994, is a contemporary mechanism for transferring large amounts of money from the poor South countries to the rich North. The debts were contracted in the 1970s when Northern banks were flush with petrodollars and wished to recycle them, and in the process, make a hefty profit. Northern governments knew that the loans were being made to repressive regimes, like the Marcos' regime in the Philippines, which, it is commonly believed, embezzled billions of dollars and squandered the rest on projects which were of little benefit to the majority of poor people in the country. In the early 1980s, the debts ballooned out of control. Some of the blame for the disaster, undoubtedly, must be laid at the door of Southern politicians and their economic advisers. But it is important to highlight the external factors which exacerbated the problem over which Third World leaders had no control. These included currency fluctuations, often brought about by structural adjustment programs (SAPS), the rise in interest rates internationally caused by pressures within the U.S. economy, and the dramatic drop in commodity prices which accompanied the recession in industrialized countries.

Servicing these debts is an enormous burden for most Southern countries today. Between 1982 and 1990 Jamaica spent US\$4.2 billion servicing its foreign debt. Even so the debt increased by 55 per cent. Susan George, in *The Debt Boomerang*,<sup>5</sup> gives some mind-boggling data on the figures involved in this transfer of wealth to the rich. During the period 1982 to 1990 there was a net transfer of US\$418 billion from the poor South to the rich North. To give some idea of the huge sums involved, she calculates that the poor of the world have financed six Marshall Plans for the rich through debt-servicing alone. (The Marshall Plan refers to the aid which the United States made available to European countries in the wake of World War Two to rebuild their shattered economies.)

Right through the debt crisis in the 1980s, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) acted as policeman for the Northern capitalist system. They imposed structural adjustment programs (SAPs) on Third World countries, which were experiencing severe debt problems, as a condition for receiving further loans.

SAPs are based on narrow monetarist economic policies. They are designed to improve a country's balance of payments and foreign investment climate, by reducing government spending and promoting export-oriented enterprises. Though there are slight variations from country to country, the common menu contained in the SAPs package include: currency devaluation, trade liberalization, business deregulation, privatization of government-owned commercial operations, cuts in public spending, usually health and education, tight credit policies, a wage freeze and higher interest rates.

World Bank and IMF policies have been ineffective in reducing poverty and promoting sustainability. The reasons are simple: they failed to address the real causes of growing poverty and environmental degradation in Third World countries. SAPs have aggravated rather than cured the problems of many Third World countries. They have as much chance of effecting a cure as bloodletting did in previous centuries. Rather than cure the sickness, it furthered weakened the patient.

In the 1980s, SAPs caused starvation, illiteracy, political and social breakdown. In the natural world, they resulted in extensive and irreversible destruction of important ecosystems, like the rainforests and marine environments. The human suffering entailed in this was summed up in the 1989 UNICEF report: "hundreds of thousands of the developing world's children have given their lives to pay their countries' debts, and many millions more are still paying the interest with their malnourished minds and bodies."

Despite all the attempts at debt relief, which include the Baker Plan, the Brady Plan and the Trinidad Terms to mention only three – and the huge sums that have already been repaid, the size of the Third World Debt continues to grow. While a number of commercial banks and some countries have agreed to some debt reduction and rescheduling, the World Bank and the IMF have refused to reduce or reschedule the debt owed to them. These debts now stand at US\$278 billion, or 17 per cent of the total debt. One way or another, it is clear Third World debt will continue to increase and be a millstone, unless drastic action is taken.

The above discussion concerning Third World Debt illustrates how unjust the present economic system is. It does not serve the needs of the peoples of the world in an equitable way. It has led to the "overdevelopment"

of a few countries and the “underdevelopment” of most of the countries of the earth. If our world is meant to support all life on earth and all humans in a way that allows them to live in dignity, then the present economic and political system which promotes such inequalities is clearly failing.

## CHAPTER II

### The Earth's Resources Are Limited

The question of whether there are upper limits to the earth's capacity to cope with human activity was first addressed in a serious way in *Limits to Growth*, which was published in 1972. It contained a report to the Club of Rome rather than by the Club of Rome. The book generated a huge response; it sold 10 million copies in all. Naturally not everyone was pleased with its conclusions. It gave rise to many controversies about the methodology used and the inaccuracy of some of the predictions, especially those made about the time frame in which strategic nonrenewable resources might be exhausted.

Critics argued that the authors did not take human ingenuity sufficiently into account, and thus they underestimated the capability of technology to fund substitutes for the projected scarcities. It had been predicted, for example, that the supply of copper would soon run out, given the rising demand in the field of telecommunication. The invention of fibre optics changed all that. It revolutionized telecommunications and took the pressure off a metal like copper. The price of copper fell, with devastating impact on copper-producing countries like Bolivia and Zambia.

However, although technological innovation can reduce both raw material and energy use, this may be offset by sizable increase in quantity of a given item. For example, in the aftermath of the hike in oil prices between 1973 and 1988 there was a marked increase in energy efficiency in cars. Consumption per kilometer fell by 29 per cent. This gain, however, was quickly offset by a 58 percent increase in the number of cars during the same period. In fact, despite the introduction of energy efficient cars, petrol consumption increased by 17 per cent.<sup>6</sup>

While there were quibbles here and there with some of the predictions made in *Limits to Growth*, the main significance of the book was that it focused peoples' attention on the fact that the earth is a finite planet and that it cannot sustain continuous, expanding demands on its resources. Furthermore, the “limits to growth” perspective torpedoed one of the main assumptions of the present development theory that the 5.5 billion people on earth in the mid 1990s — and the projected population of 11 billion by year 2050 — can aspire to the present affluent standards of living

enjoyed by many Northern middle-class people and the elite in the Southern countries. In reality, the present demands which humans make on the earth are already breaching some important limits in the biosphere. Any substantial increase in these demands will exceed the capacity of the larger ecosystems to regenerate themselves. Continuously, spiraling demand is simply not possible on a finite planet.

### **Modern Northern Affluence is Built on Colonialism and Cheap Petrochemicals**

Those commentators who assert that the project 11 billion people in 2030 can aspire to "Western" affluence need to keep two considerations in mind. First, the foundations of Northern prosperity were built on four centuries of colonialism, during which Westerners had control over the resources and of the people living in the Two-Thirds World.

Thomas Pakenham in his classic work, *The Scramble for Africa*, chronicles the saga of greed and exploitation which was the basic motivation behind the movement of the Western powers into Africa in the second half of the 19th century. The greed, venality and brutality, which were central to the colonial venture, were often cloaked under the lofty sentiments of bringing the three Cs — Commerce, Civilization, and Christianity — to benefit the peoples of Africa.<sup>7</sup>

Second, the sizable spurt in Western economic growth since World War II was achieved when the main source of energy was exceptionally cheap. During this spectacular period of industrial and commercial expansion, between 1945 and 1973, the price of oil was less than three dollars a barrel. A handful of Western oil corporations controlled the industry and worked to keep the price as low as possible. At the same time, industrialized countries had considerable access to cheap Third World labor and resources. Western affluence was also achieved at the expense of the air, the water, the soils, biological diversity and sunlight, as we will see later in this chapter.

### **Limits on Food Production — As Agricultural and Fisheries Output Falls**

Like other organisms human beings need an adequate intake of nutritious food to survive and thrive. Because of widespread poverty in much of the South, many people there do not have a nutritionally adequate diet at the moment. In fact, the average person among the 4 billion consumes almost a thousand calories per day less their counterpart in Western Europe or the U.S. In the South the average consumption is 2,500 calories daily, while in Western Europe it is 3,400 calories, and 3,600 calories in the United States.

This situation is by no means satisfactory, and it is predicted that it will further deteriorate as the human population continues to grow. It would appear that in the not too distant future there will be a conflict between human beings' demand for food and the physical capacity of the earth to meet those needs. For example, between 1950 and 1984 the production of grain, the staple crop of millions of people expanded at around three per cent per annum. This meant that it edged ahead of population growth and, thus, per capital consumption rose. Since 1984, however, despite improved technology, irrigation and petrochemicals, grain production has only expanded by one per cent per annum. This is a particularly troubling trend as population growth continues to rise, which means that per capita consumption is falling and will continue to do so.<sup>8</sup>

The rangelands of the world which support flocks that provide humans with animal protein are also under stress. In the four decades between 1950 and 1990 beef and mutton production increased 2.6-fold. Once again, this produced a 26 percent per capita increase. Because of the destruction of rangelands, especially through overgrazing, beef and mutton production is not expected to rise, even as the population continues to increase.<sup>9</sup>

### **Land Degradation and the Loss of Biodiversity Restricts the Potential for Food Production**

Poor land management, overgrazing, inappropriate agriculture, deforestation and population pressures have caused soil erosion, salinization and desertification on an unprecedented scale. The United Nations environment Program has estimated that since 1945 an estimated 108 million acres of productive land has been lost to agriculture each year. This adds up to 4.85 billion acres, or around 35 per cent of the earth's fertile land.<sup>10</sup> The U.N. estimates that of the world's 5,200 million hectares of agriculturally-used dryland, 69 percent is degraded or subjected to desertification. In Africa the figure runs as high as 73 percent, and in Asia 70 percent.

Because of the type of agriculture which is now being pursued worldwide, and the pressure to increase production to feed a world population that is growing by 90 million a year, it is almost inevitable that soil erosion will increase in the decades ahead. Sadly, the loss of arable land through desertification and erosion is irreversible in historical time; it takes hundreds of years to create fertile, top soil.

### **The Loss of Biodiversity Sterilizes the Earth**

55 per cent of the world's richest habitat, the tropical rainforests, have already been destroyed with many ill-effects on agriculture, human livelihood, the health and productivity of rivers, estuaries, and local and global

climate patterns. The greatest tragedy is the mega-extinction of species. No one knows how many species are our fellow creatures on earth. Estimates run between 5 million and 30 million species. Tens of thousands have already been destroyed. The Harvard biologist E.O. Wilson estimates that we are losing 10,000 species annually.<sup>11</sup>

Some people dismiss the whole question of extinction by claiming that it is feature of the natural world. This, of course, is true, but it overlooks a number of important considerations. First of all, the rate of extinction taking place today is between 1,000 and 10,000 times greater than the ordinary rate during most of the past 65 million years. Secondly, major extinctions, like those which took place at the end of the Permian and Cretaceous periods, opened up possibilities for new life-forms. They resembled a pruning of the biosphere and, therefore, enhanced rather than destroyed diversity. Today, sadly, our industrial culture is sterilizing the planet and closing the door to future diversity.<sup>12</sup>

This also means destroying, forever, potential sources of food to feed a larger human family. Despite the varied diets in different cultures around the world, the humans currently use only one percent of the known species as a source of nourishment. We use only 7,000 out of a potential 75,000 edible plants. Many species that we do not use today could easily become staple food sources, unless, of course, they are extinct.<sup>13</sup>

### **Dwindling Fish Stocks**

Worldwide, fish provides more than half the animal protein consumed by human beings. The proportion is even higher in many countries of the South. Unfortunately, fish supplies are not keeping pace with the increase of the human population. Between 1950 and 1989 fish catches, worldwide, rose dramatically from 20 to 100 million tons annually. But the ability of the seas to sustain that level of harvesting is not unlimited. According to the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Office in the summer of 1993, nine out of the world's 17 major fisheries are in serious decline. Many stocks have already been devastated. The tonnage for 1992, despite improved ships and equipment, fell to 97 million tons.<sup>14</sup> The drop in catches from wild stocks is even more dramatic, from a historic peak of 82 million tons in 1989 to 77 million in 1991. Most analysts predict that because of the depletion of fish stocks, the harvest from the sea will continue to decline in the years ahead, while world population levels will continue to rise.

The main story of *Newsweek*, April 25, 1994, is entitled, "Empty Nets: Too Many Fishermen, Too Few Fish." This confirms that fish stocks around the world, from Canada to Chile to India, are being overfished. The depletion in some areas like the North Sea exceeds even that of the U.S. At

present, it is running at 65 percent for many major stocks. Unless regulations are introduced soon, the article predicts that there will be a complete collapse of many fishing stocks.

One can assume that humans have been fishing for tens of thousands of years without harming fish stocks. The damage today is being caused by the enormous impact of modern, high-tech fishing methods and huge factory ships. Large vessels, operated by a minimum of crew members, can travel to fishing grounds anywhere around the world, track shoals of fish on radar, and electronically direct tentlike nets to capture the fish, and finally process them on board the ship. These operators do not care if a particular location is overfished; they simply move to the next productive fishing grounds.

### **The Ability of the Biosphere to Absorb Human-Created Pollution is Limited**

A 1991 study by Alexander King and Bertrand Schneider for the Council of the Club of Rome gave the same warning as the original report *The Limits to Growth*.<sup>15</sup> They go on to focus not merely on the stress which continuous growth places on the resource side of the equation, but they also considered the unsustainable impact of continuous growth on the "sink" side. This refers to the capacity of the biosphere to assimilate waste which has been created by humans. The authors say that these limits are being breached in a variety of crucial areas that need to be addressed urgently.

### **Global Warming Placed Limits on the Use of Fossil Fuel**

One area where limits are being breached is in the use of fossil fuels. It is estimated that the levels of carbon dioxide in the air have risen by 30 per cent since the beginning of the 19th century. This is mainly a result of the increased burning of fossil fuel and the depletion of forests. Although there is no absolute agreement among the scientists that global warming is actually taking place, the evidence to date is compelling and is widely accepted by many scientists, especially, the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate change (IPCC).

Some scientists predict that global warming could cause an average 2 to 3 degree centigrade increase in surface air temperature. As a consequence the icecaps will melt, sea levels will rise, inundating many low-lying areas. In this scenario many Pacific islands will simply disappear. River deltas in Egypt and Bangladesh and low-lying areas like Holland, home to tens of millions of people, will also be submerged and become uninhabitable.

Other predicted changes include a significant drop in rainfall in many

of the food producing areas of the world, particularly in North America. This could have catastrophic consequences for global food production. The speed of the change will also accelerate species extinction. An increase in the ferocity and number of tropical storms is also predicted as a consequence of global warming. Many insurance companies claim that this is already happening. They point to the increase of such storms in the Southern United States and the Pacific and the resulting huge insurance claims. Hurricane Andrew, in October, 1992, cost around US\$20 billion. A report prepared for the world's largest insurance company, Munich Re, points to the link between global warming and more frequent hurricanes. It is somewhat ironic that insurance companies are among the few businesses in the corporate world which have begun to take global warming seriously.

Given these massive changes and consequent dislocation, it would seem prudent to take decisive action now and prevent the runaway greenhouse effect. In May 1990 the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) called for a 60 per cent cut in current emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, in order to stabilize their concentration in the atmosphere. Unfortunately, there is little political will in Northern countries to face this issue and to act decisively. While scientists are painting appalling scenarios, politicians adopt a wait-and-see attitude. Corporate interests, especially those in the coal and oil sectors, have lobbied very effectively to block any increase in taxes on fossil fuel. But the problem will not go away. In fact, if it is not faced, it will simply get worse.

### **The North Must Act First**

Modern human beings use energy in a totally profligate and unsustainable way. It is estimated that it takes planet Earth 10,000 years to create the energy that the worldwide economy consumes in a single day.<sup>16</sup> Northern countries use over 80 per cent of the world's energy resources, so any genuine change must start there. Ernst U. von Weizsacker, of the Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy in Germany, urges the North must act first. He reminds his readers that Northern economies are the main polluters and destroyers of the earth. The North is also still being offered as model for other countries to follow. Unless it becomes sustainable, the drive to copy Northern energy use in much of the rest of the world will only exacerbate environmental and social problems.<sup>17</sup>

Von Weizsacker believes that the North should be able to cut back on the use of fossil fuel without too much dislocation for the majority of people. There are still enormous possibilities for energy-saving strategies. According to him, present technological and social innovations could yield a fourfold increase in energy productivity. Energy-saving domestic gas water heaters and gas and electric cookers can reduce energy use by half. Well-insulated

houses can reduce domestic heating consumption by almost 90 per cent. There is a potential for reducing energy use in electronic equipment by four-fifths. The technologies to achieve most of these transformations are already available. They are not being produced because of the many corporations which profit handsomely from the present wasteful energy use. It is believed, for example, that a car which can deliver a hundred miles to the gallon has been kept under wraps.

### **Protection of the Ozone Layer Limits Certain Kinds of Industrial Activity**

Chemicals produced by industrial activity, especially CFCs, are interfering with the way ozone is created and broken down, threatening to reduce its concentration in the upper atmosphere. In recent years a hole the size of the United States has appeared over Antarctica each Spring. For the past three years a similar, though smaller, hole has also been detected over the Northern hemisphere.

Ozone filters out much of the sun's ultraviolet radiation. Dr. John Healy, a cancer specialist, reckons that for every 1 per cent reduction in ozone protection there is a corresponding 3 to 5 per cent increase in skin cancers and a 0.5 per cent increase in melanomas.<sup>18</sup> It also damages the immune system and causes widespread crop losses. Alan Wellburn, professor of biochemistry at Lancaster University in Britain, estimates that ozone depletion could cause a 10 per cent loss of barley, peas and beans. He believes that the farming community is 'totally unprepared for this.'<sup>19</sup> Data on ozone depletion does not often appear on the front pages of the newspaper or on the TV news and yet it is extremely serious.

Dr. Joe Waters, who monitors ozone depletion for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), is clearly worried by what is happening. He is quoted in *The Guardian*, February 14, 1992, as saying, "people have just got to realize that we are talking about a threat to life on earth." But the message is not getting through because it suits corporations that produce polluting chemicals simply not tell the public what is going on. Unfortunately, public officials often collude with them and deceive the public.

### **Photosynthesis Places Limits on Human Exploitation of Nature**

A ecological perspective recognizes that human beings are a subsystem within the larger ecosystems of the earth. Like other plants and animals, humans need food and energy in order to sustain life. If the human species is to continue to reproduce and survive, humans must meet their food and energy needs in a way that does not destroy the world. They must operate within the limits of the natural world, living, as it were, on the interest

which nature provides, without drawing down the ecological capital.

All plants obtain their energy from the sun. Through the complex biochemistry of photosynthesis plants transform solar energy into usable energy in the form of sugars. This energy, in turn, becomes available for other creatures, the herbivores and carnivores. Plants, however, are more efficient users of the sun's energy. It takes vast quantities of plants to feed herbivores and, still larger amounts in order to feed carnivores.

When the number and demands of a carnivorous species, like humans, increase dramatically, this can put enormous pressure on other species within the biosphere. Scientists recognize that there is an upper limit to the amount of solar energy made available through the aggregate of the net primary product of photosynthesis. This encompasses all the solar energy made available to all creatures through the green matter of the earth. A study by Vitousek, et al., (1986), estimated that humans have now captured 40 per cent of terrestrial energy for their own, exclusive use. If one includes the oceans, the percentage drops to 25 per cent.<sup>20</sup> This finding is extremely important, as it sets the context for the optimum scale of human activity, including economic activity in relation to the needs of creatures on earth. The call for a five-to-ten-fold increase in worldwide economic activity in *Our Common Future*, appears totally unrealistic, if Vitousek and his collaborators are right.

### **Waste and the Disposable Society**

The unsustainability and vulnerability of our present-day industrial and commercial society is also very evident, when one looks at it from the other end—the ever increasing mound of waste which is created by our throw-away culture. Many of the items manufactured by our industrial, throw-away society are not necessary for human well-being and end up in rubbish dumps.

*Newsweek* (November 27, 1989) portrayed the industrial world being “buried alive” in garbage. The statistics are astounding; each consumer in the industrial world accumulates 3.5 pounds of garbage each day. Where to put it is becoming a major problem. It is now cluttering up landfills in towns and cities around the world. Many communities are simply running out of space. The U.S., with its affluence and disposable mentality, is by far the worst offender: Each year Americans throw away 16 billion disposable diapers, 1.6 billion pens, 2 billion razors and blades and 220 million tires. They discard enough aluminum to rebuild the entire U.S. commercial airline fleet every three months.

But space to dump things in is running out. In the U.S. 80 per cent of

solid waste is now dumped into 6,000 landfills. But their number is now shrinking. In the past 10 years almost 5,000 have been filled and shut down. More than two-thirds of the landfills in the U.S. have been closed since the late 1970s. 35,000 of the 50,000 landfill sites in former West Germany have been declared potentially dangerous because they threaten vital groundwater supplies, thus contaminating drinking water and water that is used for agriculture.

### **Palm it Off on Poor Communities or the Third World**

The growth in the "not-in-my-back-yard (NIMBY)" mentality means that communities would like to move the garbage elsewhere. Trains and trucks loaded with garbage crisscross the U.S. and, of course, the Two-Thirds World is a soft-option for dumping toxic wastes. *Time* (January 2, 1989) carried an account of the voyage of the *Pelicano*. For two years it sailed around the world, seeking a port that would accept its 14,000-ton cargo of toxic ash. In October, 1989 the *Pelicano* illegally dumped 4,000 lbs. of its cargo off Haiti and probably dumped the rest overboard on the high seas. The *Pelicano* is a clear symbol of the final twist in the saga of the First World's exploitation of the Third World. Having for centuries abused their resources and human labor, the First World is now completing the circle of exploitation by dumping its toxic waste on unsuspecting Third World people.

Make no mistake about it, within the remit of conventional economics it makes all kinds of sense for powerful Northern nations, whose citizens place a high premium on a clean environment, to export waste to poor Southern nations. There was a furore in 1991 when Dr. Lawrence Summers, then chief economist of the World Bank, argued that "the economic logic of dumping a load of toxic waste in the lowest-wage country is impeccable."<sup>21</sup> Many Third World leaders were incensed. For many it constituted the last link in the colonial chain. For centuries, their lands had been plundered and their labor coerced and exploited, and now their countries are being used as a repository for the toxic waste from the affluent North.

In recent years, as more and more countries prohibit the importation of toxic waste, the waste traders are turning to Southeast and South Asia as a destination for their toxic brews. Plastic waste exports to South Asia have increased dramatically in the past two years. In January 1993, 53 per cent of the total U.S. plastic waste exports were sent to Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. Pepsi Cola Bottling Company alone shipped over 7,000 tons of plastic scraps to India on the OOCL and Presidential Lines. In response to enquiries from Greenpeace investigators, Pepsi denies that it exports any scraps to India.<sup>22</sup> Waste merchants from Britain, Germany, Australia and Canada also shipped an increased tonnage of toxic waste to these poor

countries.

Greenpeace International hailed the Basel Convention in March, 1994 as a striking environmental victory. This bans the export of toxic waste from rich Northern countries to poor Southern countries from the end of 1997. Predictably, the countries which have gained most from exporting poison — Australia, Canada, Finland, Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States — opposed the ban. Greenpeace's lobbying of the group of 77 and the decision of EU environment ministers to support the ban turned the tide in favor of ratifying the Convention. Pope John Paul II also threw his weight behind the ban. Speaking in Rome on October 22, 1993, he said:

It is a grave abuse and an offense against the solidarity of humanity when industrial enterprises of rich countries profit from the weak economies and legislation of poorer countries by exporting dirty technologies and waste which degrade the environment and health of the population.<sup>23</sup>

### Summary

My argument thus far in this chapter is that the industrial culture is sterilizing the earth and that, in the final analysis it is unsustainable. Unlimited economic growth, which is assumed in much of the contemporary business and economic literature, is simply impossible on a finite planet. The environmental movement is constantly trying to highlight the importance of developing ways of living which do not destroy ecological capital. Needless to say, this perspective is not universally shared.

### Newly Industrialized Countries (NICs) Are Not a Model for Other Southern Countries

But does not the spectacular economic growth which a number of countries in Asia have achieved in recent years invalidate the above analysis? These newly-industrialized countries (NICs) were desperately poor until recent decades. Then, in the space of a few short years they have experienced remarkable prosperity. Because of their success, many people conclude that they can provide the blueprint for other poor countries to grow and develop.

The NICs, often called tiger economies, normally include Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, and more recently, Malaysia, Thailand and Southern China. These countries have been held up as models for other "developing" countries by international institutions, like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and by economists like

Milton Friedman.<sup>24</sup> The appalling record of human rights and the social and environmental costs of rapid industrialization are passed over in silence. It is also conveniently forgotten that these countries are not paragons of virtue insofar as “free-trade” is concerned. In each case, the state has taken an interventionist approach, especially in the area of trade and credit.

For the past two decades, orthodox development policy-makers at both the IMF and the World Bank have been encouraging the next wave of poor countries to follow the NICs lead. The theory is that, when this group, in turn, has made it up the ladder of economic development, another wave of poor countries can jump on the escalator and emulate them, and so on, until the whole world reaches the nirvana of development.

The underlying development theory predicted that the first group of NICs would move out of textiles and light electronic manufacturing as soon as they moved up a notch on the ladder of industrial processing. This has not happened. They simply have widened their range of activities to include both light industry and heavy industry and simple and complex processes.

Another factor which will severely limit the possibility of other countries emulating the NICs is that the microchip revolution of the late 1970s has now made it possible for transnational corporations (TNCs) to fragment their production processes in a way that was not possible in early stages of industrial revolution. The original NICs developed integrated industries like, for example, steel, car manufacturing and shipbuilding. The potential for “value added” gains and spin-off benefits for industry and services was enormous. Today, the “value-added” gains for would-be NICs are very modest, when the cost of imported raw materials is included. In the present phase most of the financial benefits are siphoned off elsewhere.

### **Cutthroat Competition Depresses Prices and Wages**

It is often forgotten that rivalry between NICs has put pressure on them to lower labor cost and commodity prices further, in order to capture a larger share of foreign investment. Some economists at the World Bank were aware that such economic policies pit one country against another. Hollis Chenery and Donald Keesing forecast that “the increasing number of successful competitors may make it increasingly difficult for newcomers to get established,” and that the success of “a few” could leave “too little” opportunity for the rest.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the increased number of NICs chasing dwindling markets in the first World also depresses the prices for finished goods and trims profit margins.

## Taiwan and Korea

Finally, the initial leap in the tiger economies was achieved at the expense of workers and the environment. Walden Bello and Stephanie Rosenfeld in *Dragons in Distress* point out that high-speed growth without environmental controls has converted Taiwan into a poisoned paradise of free-wheeling capitalists, leading increasing numbers of Taiwanese to a willingness to trade rapid growth for ecological equilibrium."<sup>26</sup>

Much the same message is contained in *Taiwan 2000*, the comprehensive study of the impact of rapid industrialization on the Taiwanese environment, which I have referred to earlier on.<sup>27</sup> The report acknowledges that "Taiwan today is experiencing the consequences of 30 years of commitment to economic growth at any cost. Production has grown at rates that are the envy of the world, and consumption has followed closely. The environment has been left almost unprotected to absorb the by-products of production and consumption. Serious problems have developed; accumulation of solid and hazardous wastes, air and water pollution, and destabilized nature resource systems" (page iv). The comments on the disposal of hazardous waste are frightening. It states that "with few, if any, disposal facilities and no institutional mechanisms to ensure the safe disposal of such substances it is suspected that large quantities of hazardous wastes could have been dumped into rivers or onto the ground, or, at best, into rusting barrels" (page iv). In many regions groundwater is polluted and "there is a clear basis to expect this to worsen in the future" (page 22).

The report is adamant that remedial action needs to be taken now and that this demands integrated policies and programs (page 13). It states that "the situation will not take care of itself. If environmental protection is not given high priority in the national policy agenda and forces now in operation are allowed to continue unabated, the entire island of Taiwan will be in danger of becoming a poisonous garbage dump" (page 11).

The public see air pollution as a serious and worsening problem.... Water pollution is (also) serious and pervasive.... Sewage, food and agricultural waste, fertilizers... enter the water systems in large quantities... killing fish and giving rise to the familiar green slime and foul smells associated with Taiwan's rivers and many of her reservoirs (page iv).

*Taiwan 2000* ends by repeating a well-known Chinese cautionary folk-tale. The story describes the behavior of a poor family, which through good luck and hard work had become rich. Once they had made it, they neglected their land, stopped repairing the irrigation canals and became contemptuous of the difficult work of maintaining soil fertility. At the same

time they spent money foolishly and fell into debt. In a short period of time, their wealth disappeared and they reduced, once again, to poverty. *Taiwan 2000* insists that:

Taiwan's present situation has some very disturbing analogies to this story.... Thrift, hard work, and cleverness have given us a standard of living that is higher than anything enjoyed in any previous period of history. Long life is the norm... Food is so varied and abundant that we are more afraid of getting fat than of facing a famine. Modern technology provides services, comforts, conveniences, entertainments, and improvements.... Yet, if we continue along the present path, by the year 2000 we can expect to be in a precarious position, and to find much of the good things we now enjoy have had hidden costs. ... We have frequently overlooked management of the physical and biological resources that support us, and have accepted debts to the future by pursuing present and personal gain without consideration of long-term costs and sustainability.... We have gotten into the habit of doing almost nothing to repair the damage our activities cause to nature, or to clean up the garbage and poisonous by-products that result from our frantic rates of activity (page 40).

Even after the publication of *Taiwan 2000* in 1989, little action has been taken by the government. The former head of the Taiwanese Environmental Protection Agency, Jaw Shau-Kong, complained in 1992 that "where environmental protection clashed with economic development, the environment is usually sacrificed."<sup>28</sup> *The China Post* in the same editorial complained that, "Taiwan's environment is so badly damaged that only drastic, aggressive efforts can save it."

## **Korea**

The cost involved in Korea's industrialization drive is equally high. Jang Won, professor at the Department of Environmental engineering at Tae-Jon University, reports that the annual mean level of sulphur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide concentration in Seoul is among the highest in the world. Hospitals have reported increasing numbers of patients with bronchitis, asthma and pneumonia. The worst pollution is in the huge industrial export zones. Many of the substances which are regularly released into the environment, like benzene, asbestos, vinyl chloride, mercury and cadmium, are cancer-producing substances. Acid rain is also taking its toll on lakes and trees.

Workers in many plants are routinely exposed to toxic substances. Numerous workers at the Wonjin Rayon factory in Kurin City have died from a debilitating illness caused by exposure to carbon disulphide (CS<sub>2</sub>) poison-

ing. CS<sub>2</sub> is an organic solvent used in making rayon, as a lining material for coats or suits. Until recently, conditions at the plant were primitive. Workers were not issued with face masks which might provide some protection against the gas. According to Dr. Gil-Seong Yang, who has treated many of the victims, scores of workers have died, while others have been incapacitated for life. Only recently, after street protests, has the government (which owns the company), accepted any responsibility for what has happened and agreed to pay compensation. They still only pay a pittance. The usual amount offered to a worker who is already crippled and, possibly, facing death, is a mere US\$14,000.

According to Professor Park Hyun Seo of Hanyang University in Seoul, who has campaigned on behalf of the workers, successive Korean governments were so intent on industrializing the economy that economic expansion took precedence over everything, including the lives of the workers.

Water pollution is also widespread and this has adversely affected human health and the fishing industry in many coastal areas. Large companies, such as Hyundai, Doosan, Samsung and Lucky-Goldstar, are among the leading polluters. In March and April 1991, for example, several hundred tons of phenol was leaked into the Naktong River by the Doosan group.<sup>29</sup> Even municipal water supplies are contaminated by sewerage and industrial waste. A report by the Construction Ministry, carried out in August 1989, found that almost all tap water was polluted. This shocked the country but the government immediately moved to criticize the study and assure the people that the water was safe.

South Korea's growing environmental havoc is a direct result of three decades of export-oriented growth, where the government turned a blind eye to pollution. Until recently, environmental legislation was weak and full of loopholes. Monitoring agencies were not equipped to carry out their task effectively, and their procedures were often secret. Even when polluters are prosecuted, many do not pay their fines. In 1989, 90 per cent of fines went unpaid. Despite the destruction of the air, the water and the soil of the country and the consequent health hazard posed by rampant pollution, the maximum jail sentence for offenders is only 5 years.

The high economic growth rates in Taiwan, Korea and other tiger economies, which have lifted millions out of poverty, have come at the huge price of extensive and irreversible environmental destruction. Industrial pollution, toxic waste, deforestation, soil erosion, polluted ground water and the loss of natural habitat will ensure that the development is not sustainable. Therefore, the so-called developing countries, instead of attempting to emulate Korea and Taiwan in the arena of an increasingly hostile and turbulent world economic climate, would be much better off to gear

their economies to meeting the needs of their own people. As the notion of limits impinges more on the collective human consciousness, it will become obvious that the affluence of the First World cannot be replicated by every country in the world.

### **Destroying the Earth**

I have argued that the modern, global economic machine is impoverishing the poor and destroying the earth. One could continue to toss more and more depressing data from every country in Asia on the misery pile to substantiate the argument. I have presented a range of data in different domains which reveal where humans are breaching the capacity of the earth to renew itself and absorb our pollution.

Human industrial activity at the moment is changing the chemistry of the air and water, altering the hydrological cycle, and upsetting the entire self-renewing pattern of nature which has taken millions of years to emerge. We are causing changes of a biological and geological order of magnitude. It is only in the past few years that we are beginning to wake up to the consequences of our activity. There is a deep irony in the whole saga. In recent centuries we have set out, through the mediation of science and technology, to make nature subservient to human decisions and in the process make human beings as independent as possible of nature. While the endeavor has provided enormous comforts for a small segment of humanity, it has impoverished the vast majority of people and is now threatening the very survival of many of the earth's important ecosystems and natural cycles.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **How Has the Church Responded to the Despoilment of Creation?**

Every individual on earth ought to be challenged to do what he or she can do to halt and reverse the saga of destruction, which I have described in the previous chapters. But, individual lifestyle changes, however important, will not be sufficient. Real change will only happen when every institution in society — education, health, media, military, industry, commerce and religions — begins to take this message seriously and integrates it into its *modus operandi*. I will now discuss briefly how the Churches, especially the Catholic Church, has responded to this crisis to date, and how it might improve its performance given the magnitude of the issues facing the earth and human society.

### **The Catholic Church Has Arrived at the Issue Breathless and Late**

It is a sad fact of recent history that the Churches have been slow to

recognize the gravity of the ecological problems facing the earth. They may have felt, like the preacher in the book of Ecclesiastes, that while people and nations have histories, the earth is unchanging; "a generation goes, a generation comes, yet the earth stands firm for ever" (Ecc 1:4).

Despite the evidence which has been piling up before their eyes, Church leaders, in common with leaders in the educational, industrial and financial establishments, have refused to pay attention to what was happening to the delicate fabric of life on the earth. Many people might have expected a greater sensitivity to nature from the Catholic Church, given its commitment to a sacramental system. Unfortunately, in the aftermath of the Galileo debacle, the Catholic Church was ill-equipped to dialogue in a creative way with science. In recent centuries the Catholic Church tended to cut itself off from the wider European intellectual ferment, which it could no longer control. As a result, it relied exclusively on its own heritage in shaping its identity and presenting its message to the world. In the 19th century, for example, especially in the era of Pope Pius IX, Church apologetics often portrayed the ideas and proponents of modern science as dangerous enemies of the faith.

While this attitude changed in the 20th century, it did not lead to a creative, mutually challenging and enriching dialogue. On the one hand, the treatment meted out to Teilhard de Chardin illustrates that the mutual suspicions between ecclesiastics and scientists is not so easily put to rest. On the other hand, Church leaders, like many others, were lulled into a false security by some of the successes of modern technology, especially in the area of medicine. They failed to understand both the extent of the despoilment of creation and the urgency with which it must be faced. Unless this awareness is gained in a short space of time and remedial action taken, human beings and the rest of the planet's community will be condemned to live amid the ruins of the natural world.

### **Recent Catholic Church Teaching**

Let me illustrate what I am saying by a few quotations from recent Catholic Church teachings. The Second Vatican Council is, undoubtedly, the major achievement of the Catholic Church in the 20th century. The Council reconnected the Church to its origins in Scripture, helped it find a new identity in itself and face the modern world with confidence and a message of hope. The document, *Gaudium et Spes* (the Church in the Modern World), is a milestone in the history of the Church's stance towards the world. It embodies a positive, liberating vision of life which refuses to seal off the religious world from the rest of human affairs.

One cannot, however, argue that it is grounded in an ecological vision

of reality. This document subscribes to what is called "dominion theology." In this perspective the natural world exists primarily for man's exclusive use, "for man, created in God's image, received a mandate to subject to himself all that it contains, and govern the world with justice and holiness" (No. 34). This anthropocentric bias is even more marked in No. 12 of the same document. It claims almost universal agreement for the teaching that "according to the unanimous opinion of believers and unbelievers alike, all things on earth should be related to man as their center and crown." The cultures of tribal peoples worldwide and of countless Hindus and Buddhists in Asia can hardly be used to bolster up that claim!

Despite Vatican II's mammoth achievement in helping to bring the Catholic Church into the modern world, it did not have its ear finely tuned to this vital issue. It did not pick up the growing apprehension which many people shared, even then, about the future of the biosphere. It is worth remembering that Rachel Carson's book, *Silent Spring*, was published in April 1962, while the Council began only in October 1962. Fairfield Osborn's book, *Our Plundered Planet*, was published in 1948.

### **Populorum Progressio (The Development of Peoples)**

Once again this document, which appeared in 1967, was one of the finest documents on the social teaching of the Church to emerge from Rome in the past 30 years. However, it too was insensitive to the ecological issue. In its discussion of authentic development, the document contained no caution against the impact of industrialization on the biosphere. No. 25 boldly states that "the introduction of industry is necessary for economic growth and human progress; it is also a sign of development and contributes to it. By persistent work and the use of his intelligence man gradually wrests nature's secrets from her and finds a better application for her riches." This reflects the hubris of "man the transformer" which we readily associate with Francis Bacon. It forgets that the "greenhouse" effect, the depletion of the ozone layer, acid rain, soil erosion, pollution of the seas, rivers and nuclear waste are a direct result of the industrial revolution.

### **Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (Social Concerns)**

Happily, in the encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (SRC)*, published in 1988, the environment entered into mainline Catholic social teaching. While Catholics can rejoice that, at last, this crucial issue has finally found a place in the agenda of the papal magisterium, it is important to remember that by 1988 most institutions and political leaders of every hue had already moved on or spoken extensively on the ecological crisis. The Brundtland Report, called *Our Common Future*, had been published in 1987.<sup>30</sup> Politicians from as diverse backgrounds as Margaret Thatcher and Eduardo

Sheverdnaze had dealt with the issue.

The most important statement in *SRC* affirmed that humans were living in a limited world and, therefore, there are physical and moral limits on humans' exploitation of the natural world (No. 34). This, undoubtedly, is pertinent to the questions regarding the appropriate scale of economic activity which I discussed in the earlier part of this book. In No. 37, Pope John Paul II moves beyond the anthropocentric boundaries and challenges those who insist that "humankind... can make arbitrary use of the earth, subjecting it without restraint to the human will, as though it did not have its own requisites and prior God-given purpose, which humankind can develop but not betray."<sup>31</sup>

On January 1, 1990, Pope John Paul II, issued a document for the World Day of Peace celebration "Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All Creation." This is the first document from the papal magisterium devoted exclusively to environmental issues. Its main significance is that it calls attention to the moral and religious dimensions of the environmental crisis (Nos. 2, 7, 15). In a sentence that will probably come as a surprise to many Catholics, the Pope insists that "Christians, in particular, realize that *their responsibility within creation and their duty towards nature and the Creator are an essential part of their faith*" (emphasis mine). This excellent document, which is written in a clear and unambiguous style — very different from many other Church documents — is heavily dependent on the *Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation* (JPIC) program which the World Council of Churches launched at its assembly in Vancouver in 1983, though this is not acknowledged in the text.

### **Catechism of the Catholic Church**

The English translation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* finally appeared on Trinity Sunday 1994. Most of the controversy centered, not on the content of the book, but on the aggressive use of sexist language in the final, Vatican-approved version. Even the bishops of England and Wales admitted that some readers may feel "excluded by the style and choice of language" used in the English translation.<sup>32</sup>

Thankfully, the English translation has an excellent use of scriptural texts and subject index, so it is comparatively easy to evaluate its understanding and treatment of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC) issues. Most of these are clustered under topics like creation, development, economy and stewardship.

To begin on a positive note creation is dealt with especially in the section on a "catechesis on creation," Nos. 282 and 378. There, it affirms that

“because creation comes forth from God’s goodness, it shares in that goodness”; and goes on to state that: “On many occasions the Church has had to defend the goodness of creation, including that of the physical world” (No. 299). While “each creature possesses its own particular goodness and dignity” (No. 339), “man is at the summit of the Creator’s work” (No. 343). Nevertheless, “there is a solidarity among all creatures arising from the fact that all have the same Creator and are all ordered to his glory (344).

In its discussion of the seventh commandment the Catechism urges respect for the integrity of creation:

Animals, like plants and inanimate beings, are by nature destined for the common good of past, present and future humanity. Use of the minerals, vegetable and animal resources of the universe cannot be divorced from respect for moral imperatives. Man’s dominion over inanimate and other living beings granted by the Creator is not absolute; it is limited by concern for the quality of life of his neighbor, including generations to come; it requires a religious respect for the integrity of creation (No. 2415).

Although the Catechism does deal with issues of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation, it touches them in a rather light and sparing manner; a few pages out of a total of 610. The themes are not a central concerns of the Catechism, nor are they extensively dealt with. There is very little realization of the magnitude and urgency of either the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth. The evil of Third World debt is not highlighted, for example, in the section on “The Social Doctrine of the Church” (Nos. 2419 to 2249).

The presentation on the fifth commandment includes areas like war, abortion, homicide, suicide and euthanasia. But the extinction of species or biocide is not mentioned. For Fr. Tom Berry this is one of the major sins of this generation. He is appalled that Christians are unaware of the grim reality of extinction. For him the extinction of species has an urgency and poignancy because of its eternal consequences. He writes:

Extinction is an eternal concept. It is not at all like the killing of an individual life form that can be renewed by the normal processes of reproduction... nor is it something that can be remedied... nor is it something which affects only our own generation... No! It is an absolute and final act for which there is no remedy on earth or in heaven.<sup>33</sup>

Given what is at stake — nothing less than the future well-being of the planet — the Catechism should have spelled out more clearly the re-

sponsibility of individual Christians and Churches towards the poor of the earth and creation itself. A golden opportunity has been lost to spotlight the reality of ecological sin, and thereby educate Catholics about what is happening to the earth today, and what the implications are for this and future generations.

Nicholas Lash captures this kind of urgency when he writes that "those who destroy the beauty of creation or who create ugliness may be sinning against the Holy Spirit, God's self-gift in beauty and delight."<sup>34</sup>

### **Bishops' Conferences**

A number of bishops' conferences have issued statements about the environment in their countries. One of the first statements, *What is happening to our beautiful land?*, came from the Philippines. Bishop James Malone of Youngstown, Ohio, in a talk at Ohio State University, in February 1993, said that, "the bishops of the Philippines, in an eloquently-worded pastoral letter, took an early lead among the bishops of the world in condemning the devastation of the tropical forests in their country."<sup>35</sup> In contrast to the Catechism and some of the previous texts, this document does recognize the gravity of the devastation. In the opening paragraph it states: "Our country is in peril. All the living systems on land and in the seas around us are being ruthlessly exploited. The damage to date is extensive and, sad to say, is often irreversible."<sup>36</sup> The bishops went on to describe what was happening to specific ecosystems, like rain forests and coral reefs, and to sketch some of the essential elements in any theology of creation. Finally, they challenged many groups, including the Church itself to take this vital issue more seriously.

### **Magnitude of the Problem**

What is the most important contribution which religious institutions, like the Churches, can make in response to the present ecological crisis? The primary challenge to the Churches, which they have failed to face in any significant way thus far, is to remind people, in season and out of season, about the magnitude of the crisis and the urgency with which it must be faced. This concern is central to the World Council of Churches' Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) program.

### **The Church Must Counter Any Attempt to Deny the Seriousness of Environmental Devastation**

Much of the data on the deteriorating state of our air, water, soils, and tropical forests, is now generally accepted as accurate by the scientific community. In November 1992, over 1500 scientists, including many Nobel prize

winners, issued a statement in which they said that human beings and the natural world are on a collision course: "No more than one or a few decades remain before the chance to avoid the threats we now confront will be lost."<sup>37</sup>

This knowledge is not new. Almost a decade and a half ago it appeared in *Global 2000 Report to the President*. This report, which was published in 1980 and addressed to President Carter, was one of the first comprehensive attempts to document the environmental devastation which has taken place in recent decades. The letter of transmission reads as follows: "If present trends continue, the world in 2000 will be more crowded, more polluted, less ecologically stable, and more vulnerable to disruption than the world we live in now."<sup>38</sup>

A number of authors attempted to refute the arguments put forward in *Global 2000*. In *The Resourceful Earth*,<sup>39</sup> Herman Kahn and Julian Simon of the Hudson Institute dismissed the concerns of ecologists and questioned the assumptions, statistical data and perspective of *Global 2000*. In a parody of the letter of transmission, they predicted that "if present trends continue, the world in 2000 will be less crowded (though more populated), less polluted, more stable ecologically, and less vulnerable to resource supply disruption than the world we live in."<sup>40</sup> Thirteen years down the road, with a spate of new, worrying data being published on every aspect of the environment, it is clear that the perspective of *Global 2000* is much closer to the reality than was that of Simon and Kahn.

### **Attempts to Downplay the Problem Must Be Opposed**

When we are faced with the overwhelming evidence of environmental devastation, the most seductive temptation is to follow Simon and Kahn and simply to deny that anything disastrous is taking place. Almost everyone has experienced some environmental problem, so the public would be sceptical of anyone who would simply deny that there is a problem. The more insidious tactic is to down-play the crisis, and to question the scientific basis on which some of the data is based. While doubts are being systematically cultivated, governments or corporations can postpone installing safeguards, especially if they are costly, and justify their behavior by the lack of scientific clarity.

The current United States's Vice President Albert Gore, in *The Earth in Balance*, illustrates this approach. He points to a leaked document from the Bush administration to White House spokespersons during the run up to the Earth Day celebrations for 1990, which directed officials not to deny that global warming was a problem. They were encouraged instead to focus on the many uncertainties in the domain of global warming research, so

that there would be no ground swell of opinion, which might insist on effective curbs in the use of fossil fuel and CO2 emissions.

### **The Church Must Be Resolute in Witnessing to the Truth**

In the light of these efforts to downplay the most serious challenge which has ever faced humanity, the Churches must be resolute in their determination to witness to the truth. There are many pressures, both inside and outside the Churches, to encourage them to minimize the issue or evade it. They can do this in a host of ways, either by focusing on other topics, or by investing collective energy in more spiritual questions or in the internal affairs of the Church. On a number of occasions in recent years, Pope John Paul II has drawn attention to the present scale of environmental destruction. After enjoying his 1993 summer vacation in a village in the Italian Dolomite mountains, he warned about the need to protect and re-discover nature in the face of an "environmental holocaust."<sup>41</sup> Still, judging from the documents which I discussed earlier, it would be an exaggeration to suggest that the environment is anywhere near the top of the agenda for either the Pope or the bishops of the Church!

### **The Church's Prophetic Role**

The Churches must take a prophetic stance for justice and the integrity of God's creation. There are two complementary elements in the prophetic witness. The first is to *critique* the present unjust economic, political and social system which impoverishes people and destroys the environment. The Churches must be fearless in their willingness to expose evil and name the sin, most of all by refusing to pander to vested interests, no matter what the consequences of this might be for the Church as an institution. It would be a betrayal of the Gospel to tone down the justice and peace statements in order to promote the Churches' institutional well-being.

The second dimension of the prophetic witness is often more difficult, but it is even more essential. The Church must try to *empower people* to formulate a new vision of a more equitable and sustainable world. I will discuss this in more detail later on.

### **Sources of Prophecy**

The Churches' commitment to prophecy springs primarily from two sources. First, it is grounded on faithfulness to the Exodus tradition of liberation and freedom. In this tradition all people are called to freedom and to be daughters and sons of God. Secondly, prophecy must address the contemporary issues both at a local and global level. Given the gravity of the ecological and justice questions, the Church must address these with a

sense of urgency and passion. Needless to say, this is not an easy task, especially in Northern countries. Even though the living standard of the middle class has been undermined in recent years, and environmental degradation is of concern to many people, the culture of contentment is still very much in place. This culture effectively sidetracks any attempt to promote the radical change of behavior which will be necessary to promote justice and protect the environment.

A prophetic ministry dispels any illusion that the present, inequitable situation is acceptable. The prophet speaks the truth about the shape and extent of the present scourge. He does this in the name of those who have no voice in society. In the light of the equality inherent in the covenant faith of Israel, he or she challenges society to face up to what is really happening in their community. This means exposing the mechanisms whereby a community prefers to forget and deny the oppression and alienation which is deeply rooted in their consciousness. This unwrapping of reality, so that its true contours can be seen, is often best performed through the creative use of language and symbols. It enables a community to cut through the present malaise and find a "way in which the cover-up and stonewalling can be ended."<sup>42</sup>

### **Ecological Original Sin**

The prophetic ministry is seldom generalized. Rather it consists of a faith-filled response to concrete situations. This concrete dimension of prophecy is very important today. One way of deflecting any scrutiny from those who are really responsible for destroying the earth and impoverishing people is to subscribe to a kind of ecological "original sin," where everyone is considered culpable.

When every one is blamed for something, then no one or no specific group can be held responsible. Most people would be furious if revisionist historians decided to effectively exonerate Hitler and the Nazi party from blame in the case of the Holocaust, by spreading the blame thinly over all Germans or all Europeans. Yet, this is exactly what happens when the "all men have sinned" approach is adopted in environmental matters. It means, in effect, that the T'boli people — the tribal people with whom I lived in the Philippines — are as responsible for the destruction of the earth as those who create toxic chemicals and market them aggressively.

The T'boli people, and most tribal peoples, have lived in a sustainable way with their environment for hundreds and sometimes thousands of years. Their way of life and their environment have, in recent decades, been ragged by the process which many corporate executives would call development. This, in turn, has benefited many people — the majority of people

in the North, the monied elite in the South and, especially the corporate world.

### **Church Action**

The Churches must be as vigilant as the development and environment NGOs in challenging transnational corporations (TNCs) to transform themselves radically. They should be able to mobilize their international linkages to gather accurate information about how particular TNCs are operating. They should also be able to help to support and bring together groups in various countries which are attempting to combat the abuses which a TNC is responsible for in different countries.

One successful example are the communities who are affected by pollution from Union Carbide. This is a coalition of community groups in the U.S., all of whom are fighting the giant chemical corporation Union Carbide. These groups also have links with the victims of the Bhopal disaster in India.<sup>43</sup> This latter international outreach is extremely important, as TNCs, faced with stiffening regulations in First World countries, are simply moving South to countries which lack environmental legislation or adequate enforcement mechanisms.

At a national level, the Churches should support legislation that secures workers' rights, controls the power of TNCs to shutdown and relocate facilities at will, and protects the environment. They should not allow themselves to be wrong-footed by the disparaging remarks which many corporate spokespersons are presently making against regulations which protect public health and the environment.

The Churches should also cooperate with others in promoting international legislation to control corporations. Some of the more successful treaties, like the Montreal Protocol on CFCs, have obliged corporations to phase out the production of CFCs, though, as I pointed out above, they fought the regulations every step of the way. Given the diminution of political power at the national level which has taken place in recent years, the courts have now become one of the most effective locations in which to combat TNCs.

Recently, a Texan judge has allowed banana workers in Costa Rica to sue Shell Oil in the United States. The workers claim that they have become sterile as a result of using a particular pesticide. This move has opened the door to proceedings that would hold corporations liable, in their country of origin, for activities which they carry out in other countries. Naturally the corporate world, is worried and intends to fight this potentially precedent-setting case with all its vast resources.<sup>44</sup>

## Imagining New Ways

Prophecy is a coin with double images. The prophetic challenge in Israel, for example, was not confined to criticizing and condemning unjust social and political structure.<sup>45</sup> It was also aimed at liberating the imagination to equip people to think new thoughts and envisage new ways of acting, in order to cement bonds of solidarity and intimacy between members of the community. Mical holds out that hope at the beginning of chapter 4:

In the days to come

the mountain of the Temple of Yahweh

will be put on top of the mountains

and be lifted up higher than the hill... (4:1)

He will wield authority over many peoples

and arbitrate for mighty nations;

they will hammer their swords into ploughshares,

and their spears into sickles. (4:3)

Every man will sit under his vine and fig tree,

with no one to trouble him. (4:4)

Such new dreams and visions inevitably destroy the “mythical legitimacy” of the present, exploitative social reality. For this reason, the prophet is not be a welcomed guest at the tables of those who benefit from the *status quo*. Moses, a pivotal figure in the prophetic tradition, through his creative leadership and actions “dismantled the politics of oppression and exploitation by countering it with the politics of justice and compassion.”<sup>46</sup>

The power to envisage a new way of living, when everything is so staid and settled, is rooted in a radically new vision of a God who does take sides in human affairs. In the Jewish tradition, Yahweh is a God who hears the cry of the poor and supports their concerns. Yahweh has his special interests. They are the poor and those who live on the margins.

On the other hand, the role of the gods of Egypt and the divine in many others societies of the Middle East at the time was to legitimize the political and social pyramid and promote the interests of “haves,” often against the “have-nots.” These gods cast their votes, as it were, to preserve the political, social and economic *status quo* forever.<sup>47</sup>

Similarly today, the search for life-enhancing alternatives creates a variety of challenges. In the area of Third World debt and appropriate development policies, it will mean discarding much of the strait-jacket ideology of the monetarist economic theory which have inspired the structural adjustment programs which have been forced on many Third World countries.

The shape of sustainable economic policies have been suggested by many commentators. Kevin Watkins of Oxfam argues that what Africa needs today are well-designed policies that promote a relaxation of interest rates and support for targeted investment in small-scale industries.<sup>48</sup> I would add to that well-designed agricultural policies focused on food production rather than export-crops; and a package of measures to initiate and give momentum to sustainable development are also essential.

Even industry and commerce are not unredeemable, according to Paul Hawken who is a successful businessman. In his *The Ecology of Commerce* Hawken criticizes the economics and ethos of much of contemporary business. "Quite simply, our business practices are destroying life on earth."<sup>49</sup> But Hawken does not succumb to a paralyzing fatalism that things cannot change. He believes that business can and must mimic nature, where everything is reused and recycled, and that this can make good business sense by lowering costs and retaining customers through the production of superior and more durable goods and better service.

In nature the waste of one organism becomes the food of another; so nothing is lost. Hawken's book sketches a future symbiosis of business, customers and ecology.<sup>50</sup> He claims that such a restorative, sustainable economy could provide more and better jobs, create a more healthy and secure environment, and lead to an overall improvement in the quality of life for people.

To achieve this, Hawken offers some guidelines for sustainable, innovative enterprises. These are not meant to be either exhaustive or to become a potential straitjacket aimed at stifling creativity.

- Sustainable businesses should replace nationally and internationally-produced items with products created locally or regionally. A community which consumes locally-produced goods and services exports less capital and is less likely to deplete or pollute its own environment, either by its manufacturing processes or by its agricultural practices. He quotes Wendell Berry's comment that a restorative company "finds the shortest, simplest way between the earth, the hands and the mouth."

- Sustainable businesses take responsibility for the effects they have on the natural world. An example of radical redesign, which he offers here, is Sally Fox, the founder of natural Cotton Colours, Inc. She has bred cotton with a variety of natural colors, thus eliminating the need for toxic dyes and mordants.

- Sustainable businesses do not require exotic sources of capital in order

to grow and develop. He cautions against the dangers of venture capital which can easily become “vulture” capital. He acknowledges that a number of financial institutions takes seriously their responsibility to fund local needs and activities. One such institution is the South Shore Bank in the South Shore area of Chicago which, since its inception in 1973, has provided loans for local needs. The Grameen Bank founded in Bangladesh, and now present in many southern countries, is another such institution which provides the poor with capital for personal and business needs.

– Sustainable businesses engage in production processes and services that are human, worthy, dignified and intrinsically satisfying.

– Sustainable business create objects of durability and long-term utility, whose ultimate use or disposition will not be harmful for future generations.

– Finally, sustainable businesses change consumers into customers through education.

Some will say that these and other alternative policies are not practical. They will point out that they are neither economically viable nor politically attainable in the present global climate. I have experienced this kind of response myself, often tinged with condescending smiles, in my dealing with many officials at government level and in multilateral institutions. The often unspoken reaction is that, while they might sound good in theory, they are based on naive assumptions and are quite impractical.

To return to the role of prophecy. Walter Brueggeman argues in *The Prophetic Imagination*, that in the contemporary world the consciousness and imagination of many Christians have been coopted by the dominant economic and political system. According to him, we have been so conditioned by the organs of the establishment to think in a certain way, that we are unable to think any other thoughts. In the area of military spending, for example, political leaders expect people to be silent in the face of the human cost of war and the colossal waste of resources in the armaments industry. The same is true of other areas of national and global economic life which are often controlled by a small elite. They expect people to be blind to the rapacious actions which breed such poverty and environmental destruction.

In such a situation, when so many people are cowed into silence, a prophetic ministry is desperately needed. This ought to embolden people to ask “not whether something is practical or viable, but whether it is *imaginable*...” “It is the vocation of the prophet to keep alive the ministry of the imagination, to keep conjuring and proposing alternative futures to the

single one the king wants to urge as the only thinkable one.”<sup>57</sup>

Furthermore, the Church must also attempt to become an alternative community where new visions can be fashioned and new beginnings launched. Such new stirrings are taking place among the poor, dispossessed and those who are marginalized or directly oppressed by the present order. The Church must become more closely-aligned with these communities. In this way, it would embody the hopes of many people and could live up to its image of being “a sign raised up among the nations.” As a faith-filled community it could be bold, imaginative and radical. Such a community could enter more fully into the spirit of Mary’s *Magnificat* and confidently celebrate the power of the One who empowers those who work for justice:

Who has shown the power of this arm,  
(who) has routed the proud of heart.

He has pulled down princes from their thrones and exalted the lowly.  
The hungry he has filled with good things, and the rich sent empty away.  
(Lk 1:51-54).

Finally, the community is committed to walk in the footsteps of Jesus and actively intervene on behalf of the exploited. In his life, his word provided hope, and his actions of feeding, healing, forgiving, freeing people from demons and caring for the weak fleshed out that hope. It was out of such a hope-filled context that Resurrection could burst forth. This resurrection could become real for millions of people today.

#### CHAPTER IV

##### Challenge the Values Which Underpin Our Earth-Consuming Economy

Another service which the Church can perform is to *challenge the values* which underpin our earth consuming culture. This will involve unmasking the contemporary idols which are seducing many people, and fostering untold pain, exploitation and destruction.

Unfortunately, it is not always true that what passes for religious values are always life-giving, and that it is the secular values which are problematic. Religious people often subscribe to this misconception. So does the Vatican document which was submitted to the Rio Conference. It assumed that religious values will act as an antidote to the earth-destroying values. This, of course, is not always the case. Some of the values which I will identify as contributing to the destruction of the earth have, at least, some roots in our Christian religious heritage. So the Church, along with other institutions, must also strike its breast and pursue the path of conversion.

In the process it can begin to fashion a theology which will address the new challenges in an effective way, and in the process discover new insights into the Scriptures, and find a new urgency for its message of love and hope in the contemporary world.

The choices which people make in their daily lives spring from the values which society espouses. For this reason it is worth reflecting on the values which drive our global economy. Most commentators would maintain that economic considerations are the main impetus behind the saga of destruction today. Classical economists might argue that economics, like other sciences, are value-free. In reality, economies, whether local and simple, or global and complex, are driven by the values which humans consider to be desirable. It is essential to lay bare the dysfunctional values which underpin our present economic system, before one can confront them and other substitute values. James Robertson calls these "SHE values" — sane, humane, and ecologically friendly ones.

### **Anthropocentrism — the Human-Centered Agenda**

Almost every aspect of Western culture, from religion to science, is extremely anthropocentric. In our modern world, this human-centered hubris is most clearly seen in the area of Western science and technology. These are seen as providing humans with power over the natural world, which in turn is seen as raw material to be manipulated and molded by humans for their own purposes. The writings of Sir Francis Bacon, Rene Descartes and Isaac Newton provided the intellectual justification for the progressive drive to manipulate and conquer nature.

Anthropocentrism is very evident in the way in which scientists and technicians have approached the natural world. Like the above trio, they have seen their role as that of transforming nature for human betterment. Anthropocentrism, however, has a much longer ancestry. Its roots go deep into the earliest forms of Western consciousness, in both the Jewish and Greek experience. Human centeredness, and its concomitant dualisms of body/spirit and male/female, and its hierarchial method of valuing reality, are pervasive and have numerous manifestations. It also colors a person's understanding of the reality and role of the Divine. God is seen as sovereign and superior to nature, occupying the top rung of the ladder of being and possessing male attributes. As Pierre Gassendi (one of the founders of the French Academy of Sciences) put it in the 17th century: "God is not the soul of the world, but its governor and director."<sup>52</sup>

### **Dominate the Earth**

The will to dominate the earth begins with an understanding that hu-

mans are radically different from everything else in creation. It assumes that there is an unbridgeable chasm between humans and the rest of creation. They, and they alone, are endowed with spirit. They are unique insofar as they are created in "the image and likeness of God" (Gen 1:26). This likeness (*imago Dei*) is seen primarily in their spiritual faculties, like intelligence and will. Humans are seen as superior to the rest of creation and in some ways not an integral part of it. We think we have more an affinity with spiritual beings, like angels, than with the rest of the animal world. Psalm 7:5 reflects this in its jubilant cry: "You have made him little less than a god."

The rest of creation is perceived as not having any sacred dimension to it and, thus, it has no real significance or claim to possess intrinsic rights. It is simply matter and, consequently, not prized or valued. Its primary purpose is to be a resource base in order to meet human needs. The most recent example of this is the Holy See's statement to the Rio Conference:

For the ultimate purpose of environmental and development programs is to enhance the quality of human life, *to place creation in the fullest possible way at the service of the human family.* (Emphasis mine.)

The historian Keith Thomas, in his *Man and the Natural World*, writes that during the sixteenth and seventeenth century Western literature, theology and popular preaching ascribed no intrinsic value to the natural world. With the natural world shorn of any religious values and thus, any inherent rights, the Genesis command: "Be fruitful, multiply fill the earth and conquer it. Be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of the heaven and all the living animals in the earth," could easily be invoked to legitimize any human exploitation of the natural world.<sup>53</sup>

Clive Ponting concurs with this view in *A Green History of the World*. Looking at the broad sweep of European culture he finds that:

A strong conviction running through both classical and Christian tradition has been that human beings have been put in a position of dominance over the rest of a subordinate nature. Although the ideas that humans have a responsibility to preserve a natural world of which they are merely guardians can be traced through a succession of thinkers, it has remained a minority tradition.<sup>54</sup>

In the seventeenth-century, thinkers like Rene Descartes and Francis Bacon added their voices to this human-centered chorus. As founding fathers of modern science, they recognized that the emerging scientific revolution would give humans greater control over nature. For Bacon, the scientific

venture, which consisted of understanding nature in order to regulate it more effectively, took on the overtones of a religious vocation or crusade. Once rebellious nature was tamed, the complete human control, which was thought to have existed in Paradise before the Fall, would be restored. Thus, in Descartes celebrated phrase, it would make humans "masters and possessors of nature."

For Ponting and Thomas modern European attitudes towards nature spring from both the Greco-Roman and Jewish heritage. Lynn White, the American historian, in his now famous lecture delivered at the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 1966, narrows the field of blame and concentrates on the religious roots of Western culture. He indicts the Christian tradition and maintains that our present ecological troubles will continue until there is a major shift in Westerners' religious perspective. White maintains that Westerners feel "superior to nature, contemptuous of it, and willing to use it for our slightest whim."<sup>55</sup>

Many theologians and Scripture scholars point out that this view of nature is not an accurate interpretation of the Genesis text. Ted F. Peters is adamant that the command cannot be interpreted as a licence for humans to change and transform the natural world according to any human whim or fantasy. The command, in fact, is a challenge to humans to imitate God's lovingkindness and faithfulness and to act as his viceroy in relationship with the non-human components of the earth community. This, he argues, is the original meaning of the Hebrew word *radah* used in the text. Like viceroys of the king, men and women are expected to be just, honest, and render real service.<sup>56</sup> While all this may well be true, the domination perspective is still a generally-accepted reading of the first account of creation in Genesis 1:1-2, 4a for many Christians today. This places humans at the top of a pyramid, in which those above have the right to exploit those lower down on the scale.

### **The Call to Abandon Anthropocentrism**

The need to repent, abandon anthropocentrism and choose a life-centered ethic was very much to the fore in the celebrated address by the Korean theologian, Chung Hyun-Kying, at the World Council of Churches meeting in Canberra in 1991.

One of the most crucial agendas for our generation is to learn how to live with the earth, promoting harmony, sustainability and diversity. Traditional Christian creation theology and Western thinking put the human, especially men, at the center of the created world, and men have had the power to control and dominate the creation. Modern science and development models are based on this assumption. We

should remember, however, that this kind of thinking is alien to many Asian people and the indigenous people of the world. For us the earth is the source of life and nature is "sacred, purposeful and full of meaning." Human beings are a very small part of nature, not above it. For example, for Filipinos, the earth is their mother. They call her *Ina*. *Ina* means "mother" in Tagalog. *Ina* is the great goddess from whom all life comes. As you respect your mother, you should respect the earth. Isn't it true also that in the Christian tradition we affirm that we all come from the earth? God made us from the dust of the earth.<sup>57</sup>

### **Stewardship**

Biblical scholars maintain that the second account of creation, Genesis 2:4-3:24, is much older and much more earthy than the account in Genesis chapter 1. In this cluster of stories humans are created by Yahweh from the earth, 'adamah. This is a play on the word 'adam. "Yahweh God fashioned man of dust from the soil. Then he breathed into his nostrils a breath of life, and thus man became a living being" (Gen 2.7). The image used here is that of the master potter carefully molding the clay until a beautiful piece of pottery emerges. Yet, even here the most crucial factor in human emergence, the breath of life, is not derived from the earth but from the breath of Yahweh.

In this account Yahweh's involvement with humans does not end with the act of creation. He planted a garden for humans and "took man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it." The Hebrew words used here are *abad* and *shamar*. *Abad* means to "work" or "till" but it also has overtones of service, while *shamar* means "keep," with overtones of preserving and defending from harm.

The Genesis 2:15 text is often used to champion the notion of stewardship as one of the most appropriate Judeo-Christian concepts for addressing the environmental question. Human beings were created in the "image" of God and commanded to rule over other creatures (Gen 1:26-28). In the same way as the viceroy was seen as the representative of the king in the ancient Near East, humans were deemed to be the representatives of God in the Genesis account. The rest of creation was entrusted to humans; not to exploit and destroy but to rule with mercy, love and real concern for the welfare of all (Ps 72). Humans were challenged to use wisely and sparingly the good things that God has created. The Hebrew Scriptures recognized that humans beings, like all other animals, do not create their own energy. They are dependent on other creatures. The final paragraph of Wendell Berry's book, *The Gift of Good Land*, captures this point beautifully:

To live we must daily break the body and shed the blood of creation. When we do this knowingly, lovingly, skilfully and reverently it is a sacrament. When we do it ignorantly, greedily and destructively, it is a desecration. In such a desecration we condemn ourselves to spiritual and moral loneliness and others to want.<sup>59</sup>

This notion of stewardship underlies many commendable practices which are found in the Mosaic Law, like the Sabbath rest for humans, the animals and the land (Ex 23:10-12), respect for breeding stock (Dt 22:6-7), and the prohibition against destroying fruit trees (Dt 20:19). Modern agriculture and labor practices would do well to take seriously once again the rhythms of the natural world and of human living.

### Problems with the Stewardship Concept

Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that there are a number of serious difficulties and dangers with this approach. Some recent studies, especially one by Clare Palmer,<sup>60</sup> have raised serious questions about whether this concept is really suitable for addressing many of the complex issues raised by the contemporary ecological crisis. She points out that in both the Old and New Testaments the notion of stewardship appears in the context either of a steward looking after the master's property or, as in some of the New Testament parables, his money. They focus on the rights and responsibilities of a steward for his master's property (Dan 1:11, Matt 24:45-51). In the analogy, the master is perceived to be absent, so the steward is responsible for the running of the household in a fair and efficient way, until the master returns.

The first difficulty with the stewardship analogy is that God is viewed as an absentee landlord, who has put human beings in charge of the rest of creation. It implies that, having created the world, God has absented himself from its day-to-day activities and left this in the hands of humans. In addition, within the context of the understanding of this analogy, the earth is reified and becomes either inert property to be cared for or financial resources to be managed in a way that gives a good return on the investment.

A reified earth stripped of any divine presence gives a very impoverished understanding of creation. It is, needless to say, challenged from within the biblical tradition itself. The Bible affirms the presence and "indwelling" of God in both humanity and in the rest of creation. In the words of the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, in the first line of the poem, *God's Grandeur*, "the world is charged with the grandeur of God." Psalm 19:1 declares that "the heavens declare the glory of God, the vault of heaven proclaims his handiwork." Yahweh delights in creation itself (Gen 1:10, 12b, 19), even before the emergence of humans.

The stewardship metaphor is unable to carry any overtones of the earth as the body of God so dear to some of the Hindu scriptures. The *Isa Upanishad* affirms that everything, from a blade of grass to the cosmos as a whole, is the home of God. God lives in every corner of existence. Therefore, the whole of creation is sacred.<sup>61</sup> Christian theology, almost from its earliest days, was so frightened of slipping into pantheism that it often, in practice, forgot the immanence of God in creation. Nevertheless, the notion of the earth as the body of God is not completely lacking in Christian theology. Thomas Aquinas, in a moment of daring, can affirm that “*sic est anima in corpore, sicut Deus in mundo*” (“God dwells in the world in the same way as the soul dwells in the body.”)<sup>62</sup>

When this idea of the earth as the body of God is run through the stewardship prism, it becomes clear immediately how problematic the idea is from a variety of theological and ecological angles. It envisages a God who is conceived as existing outside creation. This being contracts a single, fairly recently-evolved species, *homo sapiens*, to manage his /her body on behalf of himself/herself or of other humans, or of future generations of humans or of the rest of creation. Which of those different parties are the intended beneficiary of stewardship is not at all clear?

Daniel L Migliore, in his book *Faith Seeking Understanding*, draws attention to some of the limitations of the earth as the body of God metaphor. He suggests that it “fails to depict appropriately either the freedom of God in relation to the world or the real otherness and freedom of the world.”<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, it helps clarify the the limitations inherent in the notion of stewardship. Humans, in fact, have not managed the earth for the good of the whole human community, not to mention of the earth community. Furthermore, much human interference with nature has been extremely deleterious, mainly because it has been shortsighted, and oblivious of the impact on other creatures. Industrial agriculture, for example, when practised on fragile cropland, especially in the tropics, may initially produce large quantities of food. But from the perspective of the forest, the topsoil and the nearby river and estuary, it is destructive. Consequently, it will also be a disaster for future generations when the soil is degraded and unavailable to meet their needs.

Another danger associated with the stewardship analogy is that it appears to give humans some proprietary rights over the rest of creation. Once again, this is also challenged in the Bible. As the Psalmist puts it: “the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof” (Ps 24:1). In Leviticus it is clear that Yahweh too is the owner of the land; “it (the land) must not be sold in perpetuity, for the land belongs to me and to me you are only strangers and guests” (Lev 25:23).

Stewardship also implies that nature is somehow incomplete, unless it is improved upon by human hands. Only when nature is managed by humans, through, for example, the cultivating of a garden, does it begin to have any real significance. Human activity is usually seen as completing or perfecting raw nature. A landscape transformed by human hands and planted like a lawn, even in a country like Australia where water is scarce, is usually preferred to an untouched or natural habitat. This attitude has deep roots within the biblical tradition.

### **Nature Is Stubborn and Often Uncooperative**

Frederick Turner, in his *Beyond Geography*, insists that environmental factors must be taken into account in any attempt to understand the biblical perspective of the natural world.<sup>64</sup> In their efforts to survive in the Fertile Crescent, countless generations wrestled with nature to keep its destructive (from a human point of view) potential in check. They drained marshes, dug irrigation canals, terraced hillsides and built protective fortification against marauding animals and hostile armies. All of this was considered necessary to support growing populations from the natural world. It was hard, backbreaking work, and nature was often experienced as stubborn, capricious and uncooperative. The pain, toil and effort is echoed in Genesis:

Accursed shall be the soil because of you.  
Painfully you will get your food from it  
as long as you live.  
It will yield you brambles and thistles,  
as you eat the produce of the land.  
By the sweat of your face  
you will earn your food,  
until you return to the ground (Gen 3:17-19).

Contemporary English reflects this attitude towards nature of always having to alter it before it becomes really significant. We speak of a place where humans have left their imprint, for example, building houses as a "development" area. The first settlers, in what is today the United States and Australia, justified taking land from the indigenous people, because they were not engaged in agriculture and so were not seen to be using the land as God intended it to be used.

Given the poor track record which humans, especially those imbued with a European attitude, have towards the rest of creation, the heavy layer of managerial overtones present in the notion of stewardship is not very helpful. Many fear that hidden in the stewardship analogy is a deep-seated

hubris that humans have the knowledge, ability and integrity to rearrange nature and improve on it. Moreover, there is a feeling that the good steward can amass such a comprehensive knowledge of his/her subject, be it in the area of farm management or financial dealings, that his/her policies and projects would be truly constructive and beneficial.

The danger is that this viewpoint might spill over into one's stance towards the natural world, and then one could fool oneself into thinking that a comprehensive knowledge of the natural world is also possible. But the living world of a rain forest, for example, is so complex, so inter-related, so delicately balanced that humans can never presume to have the thorough knowledge, which is assumed in the stewardship analogy, to manage the natural world in any effective way. Any engagement with it, or effort to change it, should begin with this humble admission. The most recent and potentially disastrous area where this managerial ethos is evident is in the area of biotechnology and genetic engineering.

Palmer criticizes the proposition that "all created goods are directed to the good of humanity," as the most dangerous assumption contained in the idea of stewardship. "If the natural world is like a huge bank account which we may use, however prudently, then environmental ethics which flows from this is entirely human-centered. Provided that something can be justified as benefiting humanity or some segment of humanity, it is morally acceptable under a stewardship ethic."<sup>65</sup> But even the Bible is clear on the fact that the *raison d'être* of creation is not found primarily in its ability to meet human needs. It has its own dignity, its own rights and reason for being, quite apart from its role in sustaining humans.

### **The Earth Community in the Scriptures**

Furthermore, Yahweh is not confined to acting in creation through the mediation of humans. The Bible asserts that Yahweh himself tends creation. He can and does reach into areas which are inaccessible to humans. Psalm 104 states: "You set springs gushing in ravines, running down between the mountains, supplying water for wild animals, attracting the thirsty donkeys; there the birds of the air make their nests and sing among the branches" (Ps 104:10-12).

God is also seen as present within creation. Despite the traditional affirmations about the immanence of God in all reality, the Christian Churches have been very wary of anything that smacks of pantheism. This over-reacting to God's abiding presence in the world has effectively removed God from creation, and firmly placed the Divine in transcendent reality. We need to redefine our idea of the Divine, not in pantheistic terms which do not move beyond the horizon of seeing God in everything and every-

thing in God, but rather in terms of *panentheism*.

This asserts that God is in all reality, and all reality is in God. The Divine, however, is not limited to natural phenomena. This vision of God in all creation and all creation in God is precisely what is needed today in order to resanctify all of nature. While human beings will be seen to have a crucial place within this wider sacred community, the dignity and intrinsic value of other creatures will be acknowledged. Such a revisioning will inevitably evoke a whole cluster of new relationships, those between human beings and God, intrahuman relationships and human relationships with the rest of creation.

Within that larger framework, the stewardship metaphor will be seen in its true context. It will become clear that it is not the only metaphor which Christians have to mediate our relationships with nature. I have dwelt at length with it here, because it is so pervasive in Christian thinking and also in the modern planning paradigm.

### **Ecocentered Ethics**

The traditional anthropocentric ethical norms of our Western humanist or religious tradition are not capable of addressing the challenges which the earth community now faces. Unfortunately, in these traditions only humans have rights; other members of the earth community are mere instruments to be used by humans to meet their needs. The bottom line is that the earth is at the service of humans. It is crucial that this perspective be abandoned immediately if further irreversible, ecological, damage is to be avoided. Humans must broaden their horizons and begin to see themselves within the larger context of the earth, as an integral community of all the living and non-living components. For Fr. Thomas Berry, the domain of ethics "concerns the manner whereby humans give expression at the rational level to the ethics of this larger community." Berry contends that, if we are to have a proper ethical framework adequate for the present task, we must recognize that "the human community is subordinate to the ecological community. The ecological imperative is not derivative from human ethics. Human ethics is derivative from the ecological imperative. The basic ethical norm is the well-being of the comprehensive community, not the well-being of the human community. The earth is a single ethical system, as the universe itself is a single ethical system."<sup>66</sup>

In the wake of the Exxon Valdez disaster of 1989 a number of commercial companies, non-government organizations and Churches came together and drew up a list of ethical principles which they pledge to use as a guide in their commercial activity. These are called the *Valdez Principles*. The first and most fundamental principle highlighted the need to protect the

biosphere as the most basic goal of any human activity, including, in this case, economic activity.

### **The Need to Reclaim and Highlight the Ecologically Sensitive Aspects of the Judeo-Christian Tradition**

This concern for the well-being of the total biosphere is challenging the Churches to engage in what the Australian theologian, Elaine Wainwright, calls the hermeneutics of reclamation.<sup>67</sup> This involves identifying and developing those stories and themes in the biblical tradition which take a biocentric rather than a homocentric perspective on creation. A number of biblical scholars, among them Robert Murray, have been acutely aware of the environmental questions in their research. Murray writes that, "I became convinced that the theology of creation, especially as it has development among Christians, has improperly narrowed the scope and power of the Bible's teaching about our place and responsibilities in the world, at a time when it is needed as never before."<sup>68</sup>

The Noah story (Gen 6:11-9:17), for example, embodies a concern for the whole web of creation and, therefore, it has a profound message for our modern world. Yahweh commanded Noah to conserve nature: "From all living creatures, from all living things, you must take two of every kind aboard into the ark, to save their lives with yours; they must be male and female" (Gen 6:19). In the wake of the flood, Yahweh renewed the command of Gen 1:28 to humans to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (Gen 9.1). Even though humans were designated as the "terror and the dread of all the wild beasts and all the birds of heaven, of everything that crawls on the ground and all the fish of the sea" (Gen 9:2), nevertheless, after the flood, Yahweh entered into a covenant, not just with Noah and his family of human beings, but with future generations and all creation:

God spoke to Noah and his sons. I am now establishing my covenant with you and with your descendants to come, and with every living creature that was with you; birds, cattle and every wild animal with you, everything that came out of the ark...

"And this," God said, "is the sign of the covenant which I now made between myself and you and every living creature with you for all ages to come. I now set my bow in the clouds and it will be a sign of the covenant between *me and the earth*" (Gen 9:8-14) (NJB).

For Robert Murray, the Noah text involves a cosmic covenant which "binds humans and animals together as the Creator's partners (Gen 9:8-17). For him it cannot be adequately understood within either the model

of the Mosaic covenant in Exodus or the covenant between Yahweh and the house of David in 2 Sam 7. In the Noah covenant Yahweh, human beings and the rest of creation are all included."<sup>69</sup>

This linking of the covenant with creation has been taken up by the *Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation* program of the World Council of Churches. At their Convocation in Seoul, Korea, in 1990, four areas were selected for acts of covenanting. These were:

- a just economic order and liberation from the bondage of debt
- the security of all nations and peoples
- the building of a culture that can live in harmony with creation's integrity
- the eradication of racism and discrimination, on the national and international level, among all peoples.

### The Wisdom Literature

The Wisdom literature is replete with references to God's knowledge of and care for all creatures. Solomon's knowledge of the flora and fauna is seen as a sign of his wisdom (1 Kings 4:33). The Book of Job also has a theocentric and biocentric focus. Humans are not the only creatures on the divine agenda. Nowhere is this more forcibly stated than in the speeches of Yahweh in Job, chapters 38-41. We get a flavor of this in chapter 38, where Yahweh challenges and chides Job's arrogance and conceit:

Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?

Tell me, if you have understanding.

Who determined its measurements – surely you know?

Or who stretched the line upon it?

On what were its bases sunk,

or who laid its cornerstone,

when the morning stars sang together,

and all the sons of God shouted for Joy?

Or who shut in the sea with doors

when it burst forth from the womb;

when I made clouds its garment,

and thick darkness its swaddling band,

and prescribed bounds for it,

and set bars and doors,

and said, "Thus far shall you come,

and no farther,

and here shall your proud waves be stayed! (Job 38:4-11) (RSV).

Chapter 38 continues to deal not with the world of human history but

with the world of nature in its beginning and vital processes. Yahweh demands to know whether the proud Job understands or can account for all the phenomena of nature, and goes on to assert that his creation is meant to serve other creatures also. Other creatures have their legitimate needs and Yahweh, as the creator and sustainer of all, has provided them with their unique habitat:

Who has cleft a channel for the torrents of rain,  
and a way for the thunderbolt,  
to bring rain on a land where no man is,  
on the desert in which there is no man;  
to satisfy the waste and desolate land,  
and to make the ground put forth grass? (Job 38:25-27)(RSV)

Who has let the wild ass go free?  
who has loosed the bonds of the swift ass,  
to whom I have given the steppe for his home,  
and the salt for his dwelling place? (Job 39:5-6).

Gustavo Gutierrez's comment on the above texts in his book *On Job* is very appropriate:

God's speeches are a forceful rejection of a purely anthropocentric view of creation. Not everything that exists was made directly useful to human beings; therefore they may not judge everything from their point of view. The world of nature expresses the freedom and delight of God in creation.<sup>70</sup>

The Book of Job charts his progression from being fixated on his own pain, to empathizing with fellow-sufferers, to appreciating God as the author of all creation. Job's journey, painful as it was for him, helped to transform him from a self-centered person into one who is sensitive to others, especially the weak and oppressed. He also developed a much deeper appreciation of who God really is and how He/She relates in an ongoing way to all creation. This transformation enriches Job's life immensely.

Christians today must make this same journey. It will involve breaking out of the narrow anthropocentric perspective on which much of our economic, educational, social, political, technological and even religious activities, are based.

Given this fresh interpretation of the Biblical tradition, we need to encode new ethical principles which capture this vision that the earth exists and can survive only in its integral functioning. This will enable us to recognize the absolute evil of biocide and geocide and the immorality of pursuing

policies which, while benefiting a small proportion of humans, irreversibly damages the life-support system of the planet. It will also ensure that, while it is crucial to be concerned about the human right to habitat within a particular region, the rights of other creatures to their habitat must also be respected. This is in contrast to the Holy See's submission to the Rio Conference, which argued that "the ultimate determining factor is the human person." Thomas Berry insists that:

the earth is primary and that humans are derivative. The present distortion is that the humans are primary and the earth and its integral functioning can only be secondary. Thus, the pathology manifest in our various human institutions, professions, programs and activities. The only acceptable way for humans to function effectively is by giving first consideration to the earth community and then dealing with humans as integral members of that community.<sup>71</sup>

This does not mean abandoning the traditional Christian insistence on the dignity and value of the human person and opting for what some call a biospheric democracy. But it does mean respecting the intrinsic value of other creatures and acting accordingly.

**Christology: I have come that they may have life and have it to the full (Jn 10:10)**

It would be a distortion to pretend that care for creation is a central theme of the Gospel of Jesus. Nevertheless, a Christian theology of creation can learn much from the attitude of respect which Jesus displayed towards the natural world. He enjoyed an intimacy with nature which is evident from his parables — the sower and the seed (Mt 13:4-9, 18-23), the vine and the branches (Jn 15:1-17, Mk 12:1-12). He illustrated his stories by referring to the lilies of the field (Lk 12:27), the birds of the air (Mt 6:26) and foxes and their lairs (Lk 9:58).

In this age of unbridled consumerism it is important to remember that Jesus lived lightly on the earth. He warned his disciples against hoarding possessions and allowing their hearts to be enticed by the lure of wealth (Mt 6:19-21). This acquisitiveness, what Jesus called mammon, has been glorified by the modern, commercial culture, and it has been promoted aggressively by the media. The result is a throw-away, earth-destroying and grossly unjust society, far removed from the teachings of Jesus or any other of the great religious teachers.

Christians down through the centuries have heard the call of Jesus to follow him. The values that Jesus promoted, the attitudes which he espoused, and his behavior towards others, are crucial for Christians. It would,

however, be a distortion of his teachings to presume that the answer to every question is to be found in the New Testament. Problems of toxic waste, acid rain, chemical agriculture, forest destruction, or rapid population growth either did not exist during the lifetime of Jesus, or, at least, were not seen as crucial for the survival of the earth and the human community. There are no ready-made answers to these challenges within the Scriptures. Having said that, it would be a disservice to the living word of God to allow ourselves to be paralysed or hemmed in by the literal interpretation of individual Gospel texts, and not try to answer these questions out of the context of a living faith. The challenge for the Christian is to be "rooted and grounded in him" (Col 2:6), "who came to bring life and give it to the full" (Jn 10:10), and thus to respond in a creative way to the challenges facing us today.

In the light of the contemporary challenge it is crucial to stress the fact that the Christian tradition does not despise material goods. It affirms the goodness of God's creation, gives thanks for its fruitfulness and rejoices in its beauty. It recognizes that God is the source of life for all creation, not just for human beings. Furthermore, it affirms that God's glory is manifested in all things and that it is in and through the communion and combined voices of all creatures that God's name is properly praised. In order to be in harmony with all of creation, humans need to develop the inner freedom which will liberate them from greed and the insatiable desire to accumulate. This demands a restraint in the use of material goods similar to that found in the life of Jesus. In a very real way the present ecological crisis gives new meaning and urgency to the Gospel's invitation to simplicity of life.

In the light of our present knowledge of how humans are inflicting enormous damage on the biosphere and creating a sick planet, the Christian theology of redemption needs to expand its focus to include all creation. While there are glimpses of this in the New Testament (Rom 8:18-25), the weight of redemption theology in both the Eastern and Western tradition is centered on human beings. This stance is reflected in the treatment of redemption in *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Nos. 599 to 618). The non-human world does not appear. It states that "Christ's death is both the Paschal sacrifice that accomplishes the definitive redemption for men, through 'the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world'" (No. 613).

In some Churches, especially, those associated with early Celtic Christianity, nature was involved in the drama of redemption. In a commentary on the poem *The Dream of the Cross*, Robert Murray comments that this poem goes beyond the theme of cosmic and creaturely compassion for the Suffering Servant but "dares to entrust the expression of Christ's suffering

to the voice of a dumb creature. The effect is that the Cross's pain stands for the pain of all creatures, with which St. Paul saw all creation groaning (Rom 8:19-22)." The tree is united with Christ in his agony:

They mocked us together. I was soaked in the blood streaming from  
the man's side after he set his spirit free.  
I underwent many horrors on that hill.  
I was the God of hosts stretched on the rack.  
Clouds of darkness gathered over the corpse  
of the Ruler; the shadows, blackshapes  
under the clouds, swept across  
his shining splendor. All creation wept,  
at the King's death, Christ was on the cross.<sup>72</sup>

### Cosmic Christ

Finally, it is important to remember that the centrality of Jesus is not confined to reflecting on his behavior during his short life on earth in Palestine. We are resurrection people. Jesus is, as Paul tells us in Colossians 3:11, Ephesians 1:9-10, and many similar texts, the center of human and cosmic history:

For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will according to the purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, *to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth* (Eph 1:9-10)(Emphasis mine).

Christ was active before time began in bringing forth creation. Through him the universe, the earth, and all life was created (Jn 1:3-5). All the rich unfolding of the story of the universe — from the initial glow of the flaring forth, through the shaping of the elements in the cauldron of the stars and the positioning of the earth as the green planet of the universe, right up to the emergence of humans and their varied cultures and histories — are centered on Jesus (Col 1:16-17).

Christians often make the mistake of thinking that the resurrection somehow catapults Jesus out of the order of creation and places him in some atemporal zone. The New Testament is adamant that the Risen Christ is even more deeply centered in all creation. The preface for the Mass of Easter Day rejoices in the fact that the resurrection "renews all creation." Every living creature on earth has a profound relationship with the resurrected Lord. His loving touch heals our brokenness and fulfils all creation. So, to wantonly destroy any aspect of creation or to banish forever species from their place in the community of life, is to deface the image of Christ which is radiated throughout our world.

## Environmental Devastation and Christian Hope

Church leaders and ministers are most vulnerable and most likely to soft-pedal the harsh realities of environmental devastation when it is suggested that their constant focus on the environmental challenge may be construed as a message of despair. The Swiss theologian Lukas Vischer put his finger on this danger in a recent issue of *Concilium*:

For are they (the Churches) not expected to be a treasury of hope in this time of uncertainty and anxiety? The Churches are easily misled by this pressure and as a result blur the challenge by religious statements about hope. But the freedom which the gospel brings must be shown precisely in the way in which Christians can face reality.<sup>73</sup>

Faced with this contemporary challenge Christians are, undoubtedly, called to be bearers of hope in today's world. The Gospels proclaim this hope as one of the basic gifts of the Spirit of God. The gift of hope, for both individuals and Christian communities, is sorely needed today. This hope involves both recognizing the present crisis for what it is and acknowledging that the lubricated pathways of much of modernity are leading to death. This is how people like the prophet Jeremiah responded to the denial and self-deception which he saw all around him in the Israel of his day. True hope empowers people like Jeremiah to witness to the truth of the present situation, especially when the leadership of society feels everything is just fine, and speaks hollow words of "peace, peace, peace," when death and disintegration are already in the air.

The honesty and clarity, which come from exposing the present illusion of prosperity, can also provide the spiritual energy which is needed to address the ecological crisis in realistic ways. Authentic hope admonishes Christians that they must be wary of many of the reductionist conceptions of hope which are alive in today's world. It goes way beyond the cynical posture of believing that nothing new can ever happen, so that the best posture for humans is to grit ones teeth and, with grim countenance, accept that "what will be, will be."

Genuine hope does not encourage the religious person to seek solace and reassurance in the present confusion by relying on a fundamentalist interpretation of scriptural text. This, unfortunately, is rife in almost every organized religion today. It is essential that any presentation of Christian hope or eschatology should not diminish a Christian's commitment to this world. Some Christians, for example, misread chapter three of the Second Letter of Peter and find therein predictions about the future annihilation of the earth. It is important for Christians to remember that the vision of a

new earth and new heaven described in Revelation 21 is meant to intensify the commitment of Christians to promoting the Kingdom of God on earth.

Neither is hope to be found in attempting to escape the present historical challenge by opting for a privatized, spiritual, otherworldly religion, that jettisons social concerns and concentrates attention on future happiness in heaven. Christians, who emphasize their personal relationship with Christ and exclude everything else, cut themselves off from the cry of the poor and the groanings of creation. In doing this, they ignore two essential elements of authentic hope. The first is a sense of *solidarity* in suffering which stems from experiencing the contemporary agony of the poor and the pathos of the ecological crisis. The second is that any sincere *conversion* and consequent *commitment* to living a simple lifestyle will inevitably involve giving up luxuries and accepting discomfort.

But once hope is cast with a social and ecological context it will free the individual and collective Christian imagination from the tyranny of the present order. This, as I have seen repeatedly stressed, excludes so many people from the table of life and forces them to live in penury, squalor and hopelessness. The willingness to dream about new vistas will give renewed energy to those who see the future as an open gift of a gracious God. It will give them the courage to set about the task of discovering new ways in which to live in fellowship with all humankind and with all creation.

It will allow Christians, especially young people who might otherwise be caught up in an enervating experience of powerlessness to devote their talents, energy and commitment to doing new things. In this way they can face and surmount the contemporary mood of despair, and thus discover a direction for their lives, rather than, as is so often the case today, surrender to the ebb and flow of an aimless tide.

Ultimately, hope in new possibilities is grounded in a belief in the God of new life who, against all the odds, freed Israel from slavery, raised Jesus from the dead and is still active in our world. This hope is the inspiration of Isaiah, who counsels:

No need to recall the past,  
no need to think about what was done before.  
See, I am doing a new deed,  
even now it comes to light; can you not see it? (Is 43:18-19)

### **The Call to Renew the Earth**

One important Christian notion captures the urgency of the task which faces us. There are a number of words for time in Greek; among them

*chronos* and *kairos*. *Chronos* connotes time as a succession of moments counted in some orderly way. The word chronology in English is derived from this Greek word. The New Testament seldom uses this word; it prefers to use the word *kairos*. In the term *kairos* the focus is on the meaning of this particular special moment. It is normally understood as a moment of crisis wherein lies great potential for good or evil. The antipathy between the forces of good and evil is seen to be coming to a climax and people are challenged to make a choice. The ultimate resolution of the conflict is assured, since Yahweh is in charge of the world, but the contemporary challenges presented demand the active involvement of believers. For many individuals and groups this will mean a conversion experience. The ecological crisis is such a *kairos* moment.

In an address to the American Institute of Biological Sciences, in August 1988, the biologist Thomas Lovejoy said that, "I am utterly convinced that most of the great environmental struggles will either be won or lost in the 1990s. By the next century it will be too late."<sup>74</sup> This states the challenge very clearly and underlines the *kairos* moment we are living in. Responding to it, demands concrete choices for individuals and institutions to help bring about this new age. The Church, which Vatican II sees, "as a sign raised up among the nations," should be with the vanguard accompanying those who are trying to usher in this new, ecological age.

## CHAPTER V

### **Environmental Concerns Must Be at the Heart of Pastoral Ministry**

I suggest that ecological concerns must now move from the distant, almost non-existent, periphery to center-stage in the pastoral ministry of the Churches. It is difficult to spell out of what this might involve as the demands of each bioregion will be different. A few brief pointers might help chart the way for the Church as it strives to accompany other groups and communities which are attempting to change their pattern of living and live more lightly on the earth.

#### **Liturgy**

Confronted by our present ecological crisis, the Church should recognize the transformative power that liturgy and worship have in addressing the ecological and justice crisis. Good ritual can help communities evolve new modes of human interaction with other human beings and the natural world. Since the emergence of modern human beings on earth, women and men have always sought to express the deepest mysteries of their own life and the rhythms of the earth and cosmos through myths, rituals and ceremonies. Robert Murray believes that Israel shared with her near neigh-

bors a "belief in a divinely-willed order harmoniously linking heaven and earth."<sup>75</sup> Ceremonies to celebrate this cosmic covenant and to dispel disruptive, hostile forces were important in Israel's religious life.<sup>76</sup>

Such ceremonies are even more vital today. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that sacramental religion is not easy, because modern human beings and, especially modern Christians, are caught in the double bind of being alienated from the natural world and of having become accustomed to worshipping in a way that spiritualizes the sacraments. In comparison with tribal people like the T'boli, Western people often feel alienated from the natural world. The T'boli, for example, live in communion with the universe. Their rising and sleeping are dictated by the dawn and sunset. Their agricultural practices follow the seasons. They are aware of the stars and the phases of the moon, and are moved in an striking way by a natural phenomenon like an eclipse or an earthquake.

Most people in the industrialized world, on the other hand, have lost this contact with nature. As Fr. Thomas Berry puts it: "We hardly live in a universe at all. We live in a city or nation, in an economic system, in a cultural tradition... We live in a world of objects, not subjects. We isolate ourselves from contact with the natural world except insofar as we enjoy it or have command over it. The natural world is not associated with the very meaning of life."<sup>77</sup>

### **The Sacraments**

The sacraments, which draw on the elements of the natural world — water, food, oil, fire, light, darkness and wind — and facilitate our encounter with the divine, should be able to draw us out of our false cocoon and reconnect us with God and creation. Unfortunately, as Bernard J. Cooke has pointed out in his painstaking work on the sacraments, *The Distancing of God*, the sacramental signs and the theology which imbues them with meaning have often been used to distance rather than mediate the divine presence.<sup>78</sup> In the light of a growing awareness of ecological issues, there is an urgent need to reverse this process and to revise the rituals, symbols, narratives and prayers associated with the various sacraments, in order that modern Christians may experience, in a more forceful way, our interconnection with all creation and our call to genuine stewardship.

### **Baptism**

In a world where water is being polluted and wasted, the sacrament of Baptism highlights the connection between living water and the power of the Spirit who incorporates those who are baptized into the Body of Christ. The parameters of this community into which the child is to be baptized must

also be expanded to include the wider community of humanity and all creation.

A colleague of mine, Father Vincent Busch, a missionary on the island of Mindanao in the Philippines, has attempted to do this. He has augmented the conventional baptismal ritual by introducing prayers and symbols from the natural world. After the normal ritual is completed in the church, the child, parents, baptismal sponsor and local community are invited to move outside the Church building into the cathedral of creation.

In order to highlight the plight of what remains of the tropical rain forest the community is invited to form a circle around a number of tree saplings. The party is then divided into four units; each has the task of representing elements of the natural world — the soil, the sea, the forest and the sky. A representative of the parish asks these communities to accept the newborn baby with words like the following:

Rejoice you creatures of the soil for we have a new companion in our community. Celebrate their presence among us and do not fear them because they have promised to nurture God's living world. Rejoice you earthworms and soil bacteria because these children will co-operate with you in restoring the land's fertility.

The texts recognize that the earth community supports and nourishes all life including the newborn child. A person who is known for his or her care for the earth responds on behalf of the earth community:

We joyfully accept this child and as a sign of our commitment to protect, nurture and celebrate the community we live in, we bestow on these trees soil made fertile by our care.

This person then spreads some soil from his/her compost bucket on to the saplings. The ceremony continues with other members of the community offering gifts to the young trees from the community of the sea, the sky and the forest.

Finally the young trees are given to the parents of the child. They are admonished in the following words:

Dear friends, the Christian community gives you these trees to celebrate your belonging to us. Like these trees, you will also need water, food, protection and sunlight in order to grow and mature, may the God of creation who sustains and renews all things through the miracle of the natural world guide you to live in harmony with the earth that gives you life. Amen.

This ceremony, which is modeled on a child initiation ceremony of the Omaha Indians in the United States, challenges this generation of Filipinos to protect what remains of the rain forest, the mangrove forests and the coral reefs. In my book, *To Care For the Earth*, I also describe an Earth Liturgy and a Water Liturgy which I used among the T'boli people in Mindanao.<sup>79</sup>

### **The Eucharist**

The Eucharist is also pregnant with all kinds of creative possibilities for deepening our awareness of the holy communion which unites God, human beings and all creation. In the Eucharist the elements of bread and wine, taken from the earth, are offered in the memory of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ, and thereby transformed into his Body and Blood. The experience of Eucharist challenges Christians to work for a just society, where food is shared and everyone has enough. It also summons Christians to work for a sustainable society, where the bonds of interdependence are more clearly understood, experienced and protected.

In an article in *Cross Currents*, entitled "Eucharistic Ecology and Ecological Spirituality," Beatrice Bruteau writes about the earth as a eucharistic planet, "a good-gift planet which is structured as mutual feeding, as intimate self-sharing. It is a great Process, a circulation of living energies, in which the Real Presence of the Absolute is discerned."<sup>80</sup> She continues, "the various aspects of the universe can give themselves freely to one another because they have no need to preserve themselves, to save themselves for themselves. This is eucharistic ecology, and it is the ideal of all spiritual traditions. The Life of the Whole continues because all parties give themselves to it by giving themselves to each other. The dynamic interconnections in turn sustain all participants."<sup>81</sup> In this perspective the Eucharist is the Holy Communion in which all the members give themselves to one another in order to promote abundant life for all. Those who celebrate a Eucharist animated by such a vision would relate in a much more sensitive way to other creatures and to the earth as a whole.

### **The Sacrament of Reconciliation**

The Sacrament of Reconciliation could provide a community with an opportunity to focus on the moral implications of injustice and environmental destruction. Through the experience of appropriate prayers and symbols incorporated into a rite of penance, individuals and the community as a whole could seek God's forgiveness for the damage which they were doing to the local and global environment. The collective examination of conscience might spotlight: How individuals and the society as a whole use ener-

gy? Whether they try to live simply? Whether they waste resources? And, finally, whether they purchase and use dangerous chemicals?

Local Churches and the universal Church might imitate the Orthodox Church and institute a Feast of Creation. At present, Catholic liturgies celebrate historical events associated with the mystery of Christ, Our Lady and the witness of the saints within the renewing cycles of nature. As yet, we have no liturgy to celebrate the original moment of the emergence of the universe from the fireball or other pivotal "cosmological moments of grace," as Fr. Thomas Berry calls them. We do not mark the creation of the heavy elements in the cauldron of the supernova explosions, the shaping of our solar system, the emergence of life on earth, the blossoming of the flowers, the appearance of mammals, or even *homo sapiens*. All these are part of our story but we do not commemorate them in ritual.

This is one of the most striking differences between modern Western culture and more traditional societies. Most traditional religions celebrate the moment of origin as the sacred moment for the tribe. These rituals guide the society in its relations with the gods, other humans and the earth. It would seem appropriate that we Catholics who, in the first line of our creed affirm that "we believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth," should remind ourselves constantly of the gift of creation and of its present plight, both locally and globally. One could realistically hope that this search for appropriate liturgies would spark a new period of creativity among Christians in music, dance, poetry, sculpture and the composition of sacred texts.

Fr. Vincent Busch has also developed an ecological catechesis around traditional devotions like the Stations of the Cross and the Rosary. He produced a set of slides, with an accompanying tape entitled the "Stations of the Cross of the Death of the Forest." The stark, challenging presentation presents the pain of the Earth in the context of the Suffering, Death and Resurrection of Christ. It anticipated the insight contained in *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all creation*. In that document the Pope states that "the profound sense that the earth is suffering is also shared by those who do not profess our faith in God."<sup>82</sup>

### **Rosary of Life**

More recently Fr. Busch has turned his attention to the fifteen decades of the Rosary. I shall include three decades to give a flavor of how he weaves in the concerns for justice and the environment. His locus of concern is the ecosystems of Northwest Mindanao in the Philippines. The following will show that any religious leader can use the same approach and incorporate the justice, peace and ecology challenges of his/her particular

area.

### **The Annunciation**

The Angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth. He was sent to a young virgin who was engaged to a man named Joseph, of the family of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

The angel came to her and said: "Rejoice, full of grace, the Lord is with you. You shall conceive and bear a son and you shall call him Jesus. He will be great and shall rightly be called the Son of the Most High."

The Mary said, "I am the servant of the Lord, let it be done to me as you have said" (Luke 1: 26-18, 30-32, 28).

### **The Annunciation of the Universe**

Billions of years ago the universe began with a tremendous explosion. Every being that has existed will exist; every event that has happened and will happen belongs to the unfolding story of that exploding fireball. In the Bible story Mary belongs to the tribe of Israel and is engaged to Joseph of the family of David. In the story of the universe, our shining sun, its planets and their moons are members of a celestial family called the solar system and that family belongs to a swirling tribe of stars called the Milky Way. Our galactic tribe and its solar family ride the expanding universe with countless star-building galaxies.

God has looked kindly on creation. From the moment of its explosive birth, the universe was empowered to bring all things into being. In communion with every pebble and planet, we can retrace the sequence of events that molded the earth and greened the land, that shaped the galaxies and lighted the stars back to that blazing instant, when creation began, and there to behold the annunciation, "Rejoice, O graced universe, God is with you." We Christians can joyfully serve the Lord of the earth and sky by walking humbly with our God on the journey of Creation.

### **The Crowning with Thorns**

The Roman soldiers took Jesus into the palace of the governor, and the whole troop gathered around him. They stripped off his clothes and dressed him in a purple military cloak. Then twisting a crown of thorns, they forced it onto his head, and placed a reed in his right hand. They knelt before Jesus and mocked him, saying, "Long life to the King of the Jews!" They spat on him, took the reed from his hand and struck him on the head with it.

When they had finished mocking him, they pulled the purple cloak off and dressed him in his own clothes and led him out to be crucified (Mt 27:27-30).

### **Mindanao is Crowned with Thorns of "Progress Development"**

The soldiers stripped Jesus, dressed him in a purple cloak, forced thorns into his head, and mockingly spat on him. Dressed in fancy words like "progress and development," money-serving policies and politics have stripped Mindanao's forests, seas and farms, and have poisoned its air, water, soil and people. But what kind of "progress and development" allows logging activities that destroy the forests, erode the soil, flood the lowlands, silt the seas, and impoverish the people? What kind of "progress and development" permits mining operations to scar the earth and to spew toxic waste into the seas and rivers? What kind of "progress and development" encourages farmers and agribusinesses to grow export crops rather than food for people? What kind of "progress and development" furthers the destruction of the bountiful mangrove swamps that provide basic food and fuel for coastal barrios, in favor of constructing shrimp ponds to gratify the appetites of the well-fed? What kind of "progress and development" promises employment in polluting industries that poison the future?

After abusing and mocking Jesus the soldiers led him out to be crucified. Are we asking our soldiers to protect a "progress and development" that is crucifying Mindanao and its people?

### **The Assumption of Mary**

When the Son of Man comes in his glory with all his angels, he will sit on the throne of glory. All the nations will be brought before him. The King will say to those on his right: "Come, blessed of my Father! Take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world. For I was hungry and you fed me. I was sick and you visited me. I was in prison and you went to see me" (Mt 25:31, 34-36).

### **The Earth is the Miracle of God's Compassion**

With these words Jesus welcomed his compassionate mother who fed, sheltered, clothed and nursed him, and stood by him during his passion and death. With these same words, the Lord will welcome all compassionate people into the Reign of God.

We can be compassionate because we live on a generous and forgiving planet. We can feed the hungry, because the earth's food cycle faith-

fully renews the bounty of the land and the seas. We can give drink to the thirsty, because the earth's water cycle graciously replenishes its lakes, rivers, streams and springs. We can shelter the homeless, because the hospitable earth mends its damaged habitat. We can comfort the sick, because the healing earth continually refreshes and purifies its air, water and soil. We can lift up imprisoned hearts and minds, because the life cycle of creation renews the wonders of the earth and sky.

Today, economic greed is killing our generous earth. Our topsoil is eroded, and our rivers and seas are sick with silt and pollution. In Northwest Mindanao, in the Philippines, some Christian communities have taken compassion on the wounded earth and are nursing it back to life. Parents, catechists and children care for the earth the way Mary cared for Jesus. Using earth-sensitive prayers, songs, readings and symbols, they also create liturgies that celebrate the dependency on the living world. Christ will welcome these caring communities into the Kingdom because they nurtured, protected and praised the miracle of God's compassion.

### **The Church Must Accompany Communities That Are Striving to Implement Sustainable Development**

Moving beyond the liturgy, environmental issues must become part of the wider pastoral ministry of the Church. It is sad and ironic that the present ecological crisis is in a very real way a result of considerable human success. Everyone will admit that greed, covetousness and other commonly recognized human vices have undoubtedly contributed to our present impasse. Nevertheless, the major cause of ecological devastation in our world today has been the unrelenting pursuit of what many people consider a good and desirable thing — the modern, growth-oriented, industrial model of development. What many people accept as the good life, something to be yearned for and aspired after, is, in fact, destroying the world. In the earlier part of this paper I argued that the most basic critique of the modern development ideology is that such development is not available to everyone and that it is totally unsustainable.

The most crucial challenge for the Church today is to help people see beyond the glitter of the tinsel of this development paradigm. Rather than creating a world of full and plenty for everyone, it has encouraged a culture of exploitation and death. The Church must then work assiduously with those who are attempting to shape and frame a new, compassionate and sustainable culture which is designed to support and enhance all life. So far the Catholic pro-life stand has been understood almost exclusively in the domain of sexual ethics. It needs to embrace the good of the whole earth community. Only something as radical as that can truly claim to be pro-life.

## **The Challenge to Live Lightly on the Earth**

Here traditional Christian asceticism in lifestyle needs to be restated and encouraged. This call to simple living and avoidance of acquisitive greed is present in the Scriptures. Jesus encourages people to "seek first the kingdom of God" (Mt 6:33), and to "store treasure in heaven" (Mt 6:20). He warns against attempting to "serve two masters"... God and mammon (Mt 6:24). In the early monastic period simplicity of life was associated with temperance and charity. Unfortunately, at times the traditional exhortations to simplicity were often associated with what appeared to be a world-negating ideology.

The Church's call today to live both simply and in harmony with nature arises from our understanding of the seriousness of the ecological crisis and our new sense of Christian responsibility toward all creation. This spirituality must promote a spirit of non-acquisitiveness, of sharing and of harmonious relationships at the interhuman level and between humans and the rest of creation. In the document, *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all Creation*, Pope John Paul II calls for simplicity, moderation and discipline. In No. 13 he states that:

Modern society will find no solution to the ecological problem unless it *takes a look at its lifestyle*. In many parts of the world society is given to instant gratification and consumerism, while remaining indifferent to the damage which these cause... Simplicity, moderation and discipline must become a part of everyday life. lest all suffer the negative consequence of the careless habits of a few. (Emphasis in the original text.)

### **A New Role for Catholic Schools**

The Church, which has access to Catholic universities and research facilities, should be well able to design similar accompanying programs. In *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all Creation*, Pope John Paul II recognizes that "an education in ecological responsibility is urgent." Churches and religious bodies, non-governmental and governmental organizations, indeed all members of society, have a precise role to play in such education.

### **Educating for Justice and the Integrity of Creation**

Catholic schools have not been very different from their secular counterparts in terms of helping students understand either the cry of the poor or the cry of the earth. They have followed the traditional educational pattern, and have trained economists, accountants, engineers, architects, doc-

tors, lawyers, politicians, scientists, managers, teachers and religious leaders who continue to be linchpins of the industrial age. Many of these graduates assumed that it is legitimate to continue to exploit the earth, without any thought of the consequences or the implications for the future. Seldom have they been challenged within the educational system to reflect on what is happening to the planet at large and, especially, on the deterioration which is taking place in their own locality.

Catholic schools should set about developing programs that would help their students to have a comprehensive vision of the earth community. On the intellectual front, this would involve introducing students to the story of the universe, beginning with the initial flaring forth, and covering such areas as the shaping of the galaxies, the emergence of the solar system and planet earth, the evolution of life on earth, and the dynamics of the local ecosystems.

Within this wider framework the students might be introduced to the development of human culture, and especially the achievements and contributions of the classical civilizations and religions. Since so much of the modern world is shaped by science and technology, courses might be designed to help students understand the enormous achievements involved here but also the darker, more destructive side of the scientific/technological venture.

All of the above should be geared to facilitating the emergence of a new, less exploitative, sustainable relationship between humans and the rest of creation. On the practical side, this will involve disseminating information about what different individuals and communities are doing to create a more just and sustainable society. Here, for example, the practical skills of self-reliance, basic crafts, appropriate technology and the rudiments of gardening and organic farming should be included.

Those involved in education must encourage and nurture every glimmer of creativity in the arts, music, poetry, religion and science, so that students are introduced to this wonderful world in a way which will allure and enchant them. Without this enchantment young people will find it difficult to disengage themselves from the present addictive and destructive pattern of living and evolve new personal and community lifestyles which are more in keeping with the contemporary challenge.

The challenges and possibilities of education for justice and pastoral action are endless. Sometimes, the focus will be global, given the global nature of environment and justice issues today. Sometimes, local issues like air or water pollution or unemployment will take center stage. One way or another the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation apostolate will

be part and parcel of the Churches' ministry in the future.

#### CONCLUSION

I began this paper with a parable about a group of revelers who were enjoying a party without giving a thought to the social and environmental consequences of their carousing. I am sure that it appeared selfish, a bit simplistic and very stupid. Yet I am suggesting that there is a similarity between the attitude of those and the party and the attitude of the people who are benefiting from the modern, throw-away and exploitative global economic system. In the latter, a small minority benefits from its operation, while hundreds of millions of people suffer and the future fruitfulness of the earth itself is endangered.

Everyone will agree that during the past decade more and more people have become aware of global and local environmental and development problems. Reports about global warming, ozone depletion, malnutrition and famine figure regularly in the local, national and international media. Often the level of analysis is superficial and there is little attempt to present a comprehensive picture of what is happening to the poor and the earth. Nevertheless, many significant initiatives have been taken at local and international level to respond to poverty and environmental degradation.

In the 1980s, the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development, under the leadership of Gro Brundtland, Prime Minister of Norway, studied these challenges and made several proposals in the area of food, security, population programs, biodiversity, energy policies and the need for closer North/South cooperation. The analysis and recommendations are published in the book appropriately titled *Our Common Future*.

In a follow up to this the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) met in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992. Delegates from almost every country on earth, and an unprecedented number of heads of state, attended that meeting. Once again, the problems of deforestation, population, poverty and global pollution were discussed and a number of initiatives were taken to address them.

Both these events indicate that the issues of environment and development are gradually making their way on to the political agenda at the national and global level. The difficulty is that politicians, economists and the public in the North think that solutions can be found in a more or business-as-usual approach, which promotes rapid economic growth, while attempting to alleviate the ugly face of development through a variety of

technological fixes.

This presentation disagrees with that analysis. In the discussion of Third World Debt I argue that present economic policies will exacerbate the division between the rich and the poor and further destroy a variety of vital ecosystems.

In chapter 2, I insist, with a growing number of ecologists and economists, that the earth's resources are limited. The most important tasks facing contemporary human society is to devise a way of living that respects limits, and yet ensures that people's basic needs are met. Sustainability must become more than a pleasant sounding catch word. It should be the central organizing principle for every human activity — from food production to energy use, security and waste management.

Living in a sustainable way will call for major changes in the way human beings live at both the personal and institutional level. At the personal level peoples, especially those of the affluent North and the elite of the South, will have to live more simply. But changes on the part of individuals will be of little help, and will probably not perdure, unless they are supported by changes at the institutional level. These changes need to take place in the area of education, media, industry, commerce, in short, in all the professions and all aspects of human activity.

Religions are not immune to this call for change. Building on what I have already written in *To Care for the Earth* and *The Greening of the Church*, I explore what contribution religion, especially the Catholic Church, can make to the contemporary task of living in a sustainable way. I suggest that the prophetic ministry should focus on this task, both in terms of critiquing the present inequitable system, and in kindling the imagination of Christians individually and as community to imagining new, sustainable ways on living. Religions must also endeavor to develop theologies, catecheses, liturgies and pastoral initiatives that take creation and the present situation seriously.

In *The Greening of the Church* I stress the role of prayer in developing an environmental consciousness. In the section on the Psalms I wrote that "the motif of praising God as creator is almost as common as praising God as savior of the Israel."<sup>83</sup> I shall not repeat what I have said there and also in *To Care for the Earth* about the link between environment and prayer. Still it is fitting to end a presentation on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation with a prayer. This prayer has not come from a modern New Age community. It is almost as old as the Church, from the pen of St. Basil, a key figure of the Patristic Era.

O God, enlarge within us a sense of fellowship with all living things, our brothers and sisters the animals, to whom thou gavest the earth as their home in common with us.

We remember with shame that in the past we have exercised the high dominion of man with ruthless cruelty, so that the voice of the earth which should have gone up to you in song, has been a groan of travail.

May we realize that they live not for us alone but for themselves, and for thee, and that they love the sweetness of life.

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# The Earth

If the Earth  
were only a few feet in  
diameter, floating a few feet above  
a field somewhere, people would come  
from everywhere to marvel at it. People would  
walk around it, marvelling at its big pools of water  
its little pools and the water flowing between the pools.  
People would marvel at the bumps on it, and the holes  
in it, and they would marvel at the very thin layer of gas  
surrounding it and the water suspended in the gas. The  
people would marvel at all the creatures walking around the  
surface of the ball, and at the creature in the water. The  
people would declare it precious because it was the only  
one, and they would protect it so that it would not be hurt.  
The ball would be the greatest wonder known, and people  
would come to behold it, to be healed, to gain knowledge,  
to know beauty and to wonder how it could be,  
People would love it, and defend it with their lives,  
because they would somehow know that their  
lives, their own roundness, could be  
nothing without it. If the Earth  
were only a few feet  
in diameter.

*Author Unknown*

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