

Catholic Association of Diocesan Ecumenical and Interreligious Officers A Roman Catholic Spirituality to Care for Creation

The call to care for creation is not new. Scripture tells us that, from the very beginning, God judged all creation “good” and told man to till it and keep it. Genesis grounds our explicit call to praise the Giver for these lavish gifts of creation and the call to be good stewards of them. Jesus’ call to care for creation is implicit in his command to give food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, shelter to the homeless Indeed, in Matthew 25 Jesus confounds the righteous by stating that such care is given to himself.

The Catholic Church has a long history of caring for the thirsty, hungry, sick, and homeless. We respect each person as a divine gift, a precious being deserving our protection, and we strive to safeguard each life. As new, often-interconnected issues like abortion, euthanasia, terrorism, trafficking, and forced migration became known, Catholics met those needs.

Catholics now realize that the environment is equally as important as the social issues that have been given attention in the Church and that in fact, certain of these issues are tied inextricably to our care of the earth or lack thereof. Can even one individual live without clean air, water, or food? Can any life be protected without concern for the basic systems and networks required to sustain life? If we “teach a man to fish” but the water is so polluted that fish are poisoned or if overfishing causes them to become extinct, what then?

Catholics in past centuries were not concerned about air, water, soil and climate for the simple reason that these life systems were not endangered. Clergy and faithful had no need to be worried that the water, wheat, or grapes required for our sacramental life might be dangerously polluted or ruined by climate extremes. Current threats to creation are a sign of *our* times.

Pope Francis understands that some will hesitate to embrace the call to protect Our Common Home. He therefore calls for — and calls forth — an “ecological conversion.” (*Laudato Si’* par. 219) He exempts no one, no nation, no race, no religion from this obligation.

Undeniably, the poor suffer the greatest effects of pollution, climate change, lack of access to clean water, and the loss of biodiversity. Ignoring our moral obligation to protect our planet is essentially turning our backs on the poor and our Gospel call to aid them. Catholic spirituality without care for creation is no longer possible.

Further, caring for creation in our pastoral ministry offers a noble opportunity to build ecumenical and interreligious relationships. Joining other churches and religions in efforts to reduce climate change and environmental degradation, results in a growing sense of sisterhood and brotherhood. By joining in efforts for the common good, we will foster greater Christian unity and interreligious harmony.

Let us show gratitude for God’s creation by making sure that it can once again be judged “good”!