

## **STEWARDS OF GOD'S CREATION – EMERGING THEMES**

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At the beginning of World Youth Day in Melbourne, Australia, on July 17, 2008, Pope Benedict XVI spoke about our environment: “God’s creation is good and it is one.... The concerns for nonviolence, sustainable development, justice and peace, and care for our environment are of vital importance for humanity.” He then goes on to say: “We have become more and more aware of our need for humility before the delicate complexity of God’s world.”

Other stories that past summer included the first saplings of a Vatican reforestation project, to be planted in Hungary this month to offset the Holy See’s CO2 production. On September 27, Pope Benedict XVI in an audience on World Tourism Day spoke forcefully: “Environmental degradation can only be stopped by spreading an appropriate culture of behavior that includes more sober lifestyles.”

Although these statements are recent, the Church’s concern about our environment is not new. On June 5, 1977, at the Fifth Worldwide Day of Environment, Pope Paul VI addressed the majesty of the world in which we live and our responsibility for it. He began by quoting the Book of Genesis: “And God saw everything He had made and behold it was very good.” (Genesis 1, 31)

Then he added: “This ancient text, so simple and yet so profound, is a reminder to all of us today that the world we live in, this creation, is to be seen and embraced by all people in its totality as good because it is a gift from God; good because it is the environment in which all of us have been placed and in which we are called to live out our vocations in solidarity with one another.”

Again and again we have heard those words of the author of Genesis as he describes God’s creation of this world. No matter how often we hear it, the story of the magnificence of God’s creation continues to speak to our hearts. More recently, we have been astounded by great discoveries in our universe. We know of 100 billion galaxies, each containing perhaps a billion stars. Our exploration creates a sense of awe at the unimaginably vast complexity of our Creator’s work.

Our planet leaves us amazed at its beauty, intricate detail, and interdependence. Through these connections, with the help of technology, we have increased our concern about the planet on which we live. We now embrace our stewardship of our earth. This is by no means trivial or shallow.

As we reflect on this moment and the emerging themes in the Catholic Church’s teaching on the environment, we begin with Sacred Scripture and the tradition of the Church. What is our journey to this particular moment in time as we reflect upon salvation history?

The creation story in Genesis is a starting point. The seven days of creation provide a spiritual reflection on how our Creator touched our world with a mystery that continues to unfold. That mystery invites further study, analysis, and recognition of the dangers, risks and hopes for the future.

We are truly blessed by this magnificent planet on which we live. In the Book of Daniel, the prophet reflects upon our world:

“The stars in Heaven bless the Lord, praise and exalt him above all forever. Every shower and dew, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever. All you winds, bless the Lord; fire and heat shall bless the Lord; dew and rain, bless the Lord; frost and chill, bless the Lord; ice and snow, bless the Lord, praise and exalt him above all forever. Let the Earth bless the Lord, mountains and hills. Everything growing from the Earth. The springs, seas, and rivers, dolphins and all water creatures, all you birds of the air, bless the Lord.”  
(Daniel 3: 63+)

We read this, in the Book of Proverbs, Chapter 8 (28+):

“When He made firm the skies above, when He fixed fast the foundations of the earth; when He set forth the sea and its limit, so that the waters should not transgress His commands; then was I beside Him as His craftsman, and I was His delight day by day, playing before him all the while, and I found the Light in the sons and daughters of men.”

Jesus often used images from nature in His parables. For instance, he shares with us the Parable of the Seed (Mark 4). Jesus speaks about the farmer who went out sowing. Some of the seed landed on the foot path and birds came along and ate it. Some landed on rocky ground, but the soil had no depth. The sun scorched it, and it began to wither for lack of roots. Other seed landed amidst the thorns, where it was choked and there was no yield. Some landed on good ground and yielded grain many times over. One does not have to stretch imagination very far to apply Jesus' words to the reality of our modern world.

In addition, we know the scenes from the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River. Images of vineyards, wheat fields, and a fig tree all reflect Jesus as one who closely observed life and the earth. Down through the centuries, people like St. Francis of Assisi, St. Benedict, and Hildegard of Bingen demonstrated a heightened sensitivity to the world about them. St. Francis is rightly revered for his profound respect for the goodness of creation. In his “Canticle of the Sun”, he speaks of creation which surrounds us:

“Praise to my Lord, the air, the winds of the clear sky, and of the clouds, praise of all seasons.... praise be my Lord, by our sister and the water.... humble and chaste in its clearness.”

As clearer signals appeared in the scientific community about damage to our environment, the Church began to respond. Of great significance is Pope John Paul II's World Day of Peace message, dated January 1, 1990. His message was titled “*The Ecological Crises – a Common Responsibility.*” He spoke clearly and directly about stewardship of the earth. Initially, he focused on the goodness of God's creation, and then he reflected on the ecological crisis: as a moral problem, the search for a solution, the urgent need for a new solidarity and world

community, and finally, a common responsibility. Nearly 20 years ago, his message became the clarion call in the Church to address the responsibility for the environment in which we live.

Also Pope John Paul II in his encyclical, *Centesimus Annus* observed:

“...It is the task of the State to provide for the defense and preservation of common goods such as the natural and human environments, which cannot be safeguarded simply by market forces....” (no.40)

In 1991, the Catholic Bishops of the United States approved the statement: *Renewing the Earth – An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching*. This particular document addressed the signs of the times, the biblical vision of God’s good earth, Catholic social teaching and environmental ethics, theological and pastoral concerns, and finally a reflection on God’s stewards and co-creators.

In the section of this statement on Catholic social teaching and environmental ethics, the subtitles give us an indication of the theological development at the time:

- 1) a God-centered and sacramental view of the universe which grounds human accountability for the fate of the earth;
- 2) a consistent respect for human life which extends to respect for all creation;
- 3) a world view affirming the ethical significance of global interdependence on the common good;
- 4) an ethics of solidarity promoting cooperation and just structure of sharing in a world community;
- 5) an understanding of the universal purpose of created things which requires equitable use of the earth’s resources;
- 6) an option for the poor which gives passion to the quest for an equitable and sustainable world; and finally
- 7) a conception of authentic development which offers a direction of progress that respects human dignity and limits of material growth.

At the end of the 1991 document, the bishops include a poem written by Gerard Manley Hopkins about Britain’s industrial revolution, a description of urban decay wrought by industry as well as Christian hope for nature’s survival:

And all is seared with trade, bleared, smeared with toil; and wears  
man’s smudge and shares man’s smell: the soil is bare now, nor can  
foot feel, being shod. And for all this, nature is never spent: there lives  
the dearest freshness deep down thing; because the Holy Ghost over  
the bent world broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

As a follow up to the pastoral letter, the USCCB’s Office of Social Development and World Peace launched the Environmental Justice Program that developed resources for parishes implementing the document. Even though that statement is almost twenty years old, it still stands as a very practical tool in sensitizing our Catholic faithful to stewardship of the environment. It

includes a call for parish communities to deepen their appreciation of good stewardship of the environment, and provides an opportunity of conversion of heart through reflection and action.

Pastoral letters by bishops provide rich material for reflection and action. In 1975, the Catholic bishops of Appalachia spoke to poverty and the environment in a letter titled *This Land is Home to Me: A Statement on Powerlessness in Appalachia*. In 1980, the Midwestern Catholic bishops in the United States published: *Strangers and Guests: Toward Community in the Heartland*. In 1988 the Catholic bishops of Guatemala issued a statement: called *The Cry for Land*. Seven years later, the Canadian Catholic Bishops published *The Environmental Crisis: The Place of the Human Being and the Cosmos*. Three years later, the Alberta Catholic Bishops published a statement: *Celebrate Life: Care for Creation*. .

In the new millennium, other pastoral letters have surfaced. It was very fitting that in the year 2000, on the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi, the bishops of the Boston Province issued their document: *And God Saw That It Was Good*. In recent years, the Catholic bishops of Alaska published a pastoral statement: “*A Catholic Perspective on Subsistence: Our Responsibility Toward Alaska’s Bounty and our Human Family*.” All of these pastoral letters give an indication of increased interest and responsibility in addressing questions of the environment.

In the Pacific Northwest, eight dioceses in the Columbia River watershed issued an international pastoral letter titled, *The Columbia River Watershed: Caring for Creation and the Common Good*. This letter was prepared with extensive consultation before the bishops released their final draft. It was published on the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord – January 8, 2001.

What makes the Columbia River pastoral letter interesting and, I hope, practical, is the tremendous complexity of the Columbia River watershed. Since the publication of the pastoral letter, noted scientists have expressed appreciation of the document’s call to preserve the natural environment. In November 2000, the Worldwide Fund for Nature and the Alliance of Religions and Conservation, honored the Columbia River Pastoral Letter Project with an international award presented at ceremonies in Bhaktapur, Nepal.

One-third of the 1,200-mile-long Columbia River lies in Canada. One Canadian bishop participated in the project. Along the river is the Hanford Nuclear Reservation, in south central Washington State, where there are remnants of the production of plutonium during the Second World War. This residue has presented a tremendous challenge for cleaning up the environment.

Along the river stand large mineral smelters. Thirteen hydroelectric dams are located on the river. The river serves as a migratory route for salmon and as a highway for barge traffic. The Columbia is a popular place for recreation. The history of the river also involves a rich heritage of Native peoples who have lived along its banks for millennia. Their culture heavily depended upon salmon for food. The life of the river was an integral part of their culture.

The environment is a subject of greater interest by the Church, but also society in general. The U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops has encouraged the implementation of the Environmental Justice Program, issued a statement on global warming, and sponsored theological conferences on the environment, such as those held in Owatona, Minnesota, and here at the University of Portland. Fr. Drew Christiansen, SJ and Mr. Walter Grasher edited an important compendium,

titled *And God Saw That It Was Good – a Catholic Theology and the Environment*, a rich resource, with several articles from a theological perspective.

I have mentioned recent statements by the Holy See that have been strong and timely, calling for us to take responsibility for the planet on which we live. There are more as well. On September 1, 2007, Pope Benedict XVI sent a letter to the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople on the occasion of the Seventh Symposium of the Religion, Science, and Environment. The Holy Father made very clear his concern:

“With increasing clarity, scientific research demonstrates that the impact of human actions in any one place or region can have worldwide effects. The consequences of this regard for the environment cannot be limited to an immediate area or populus because they always harm human co-existence, and thus betray human dignity and violate the rights of citizens who desire to live in a safe environment...

“While it is true that industrializing countries are not morally free to repeat the past errors of others, by recklessly continuing to damage the environment, it is also of the case that highly industrialized countries must share “clean technologies” and ensure that their own markets do not sustain demands for goods whose very production contributes to the proliferation of pollution.”

In October of 2007, Archbishop Celestino Migliore, the Holy See’s representative to the United Nations, shared an intervention on sustainable development. In his relatively brief intervention, Archbishop Migliore states:

“My delegation believes that protecting the environment means more than defending it. Protecting the environment implies a more positive vision of the human being, in a sense that the person is not considered a nuisance or a threat to the environment, but one who holds oneself responsible for the care and the management of the environment.”

“While the duty to protect the environment should not be considered in opposition to development, it must not be sacrificed on the altar of economic development. My delegation believes that at its core, the environmental crises is a moral challenge. It calls us to examine how we use and share the goods of the earth and what we pass on to future generations. It exhorts us to live in harmony with our environment. It is not hard to see how issues of environmental protection, models of development, social equity, and each one’s share of the responsibility to care for the environment are inextricably intertwined.”

These papal statements and comments from representatives of the Holy See demonstrate the emergence of a deep concern on the part of the Church for our environment. Our spirituality, theology, and justice teaching provide us with a unique lens through which we can observe our

world. For us as Church, our tradition gives us an “observatory” to observe and analyze the environment about us.

In May, 2007, the Fifth General Assembly of CELAM took place in Aparecida, Brazil. Concern was expressed about the stewardship of the environment, particularly in the Amazon Basin. Sister Dorothy Stang, a Religious originally from Ohio lost her life in Brazil while trying to address the environmental challenges in that part of the world. Television programming has discussed crucial environmental issues, such as the 11-part series on “Planet Earth” that aired in late 2007. CNN’s documentary: “Earth in Peril,” raised serious concerns about the environment and pointed to danger signals around the world that need to be addressed. These approaches assist people of the world to become ever more sensitive to our responsibility for our environment and the challenges which we all must face.

I would suggest there are six key themes which have emerged in the Church’s teaching on the environment:

- 1) stewardship of the earth – relational responsibility;
- 2) water issues;
- 3) energy (renewability and sustainability);
- 4) climate change;
  
- 5) concern for the poor;
- 6) vision for the future.

1. Stewardship of the Earth. Just over ten years ago, Pope John Paul II, in an address to the Conference on Environment and Health, spoke to the stewardship of the universe in which we live. He reflects that the Creator offers the earth to us as a home and as a resource. As he said,

“The consequences of this doctrine are quite clear: it is a relationship man has with God that determines his relationship with his fellows and with his environment. That is why a Christian culture has always recognized the creatures that surround man are also gifts of God to be nurtured and safeguarded with a sense of gratitude to the Creator....

“Balance of the eco-system and defense of healthiness of environment really needs human responsibility and a responsibility that must be open to new forms of solidarity. .”

This is what he said to those gathered to pray the Angelus on May 31, 1992:

“I invite all to pray with me that the high representatives of the various nations of the world ... will be far seeing in their deliberations and will know how to orientate humanity along the path of solidarity with humankind and a responsibility and a common commitment to the protection of the earth which God has given to us.”

Issues such as defoliation, erosion, slash and burn, urban sprawl, global warming, and contaminants on the earth's surface should remind us of the urgency of addressing stewardship of our planet and, just as important, the spirituality undergirding this responsibility. At the Hanford Nuclear Reservation on the Columbia River in South Central Washington State, some radioactive contaminants have a half-life of thousands of years. We must be especially sensitive to our impact on future generations, not only in terms of the residue we leave, but in leaving behind an earth that is healthy in its environment and pleasing to the human eye.

Clearly, in these later years, we have come to recognize and appreciate our connectivity on the planet. Already, as a child, I had some inkling of this. Our family grew up on the Methow River in North Central Washington, a tributary to the Columbia River. Our farm home on the Methow was only 17 miles from the Columbia River. I remember one day as a young child asking my mother for a bottle and a cork. I told her that I wanted to place a message in it and throw it into the river to see who might return it. In the back of my mind I knew this was a silly venture in a way, although I must say I thought that maybe with a 1 in 1000 chance I might receive a letter from somewhere like Japan or China. But there is nothing silly in the fact that finally, we now recognize how important one part of the world is to the other. We are connected physically in our world and relationally as a human family. Our inordinate use of resources here in the United States has a tremendous impact on the world community.

2. Water. Water covers most of the earth's surface and in some parts of the globe, water is in very high demand. Much of the water on our planet is polluted, to the extent that even in the oceans, massive sections of coral growth are dying or have died. Clean water, especially for the world's poor, is an urgent need. A very significant percentage of the world's population has no access to clean, potable water.

Ironically, the waters of baptism cleanse us and bring new life in Christ. This image and reality is all the more poignant in places where water is not only scarce but contaminated, as it is for so many who live in the degradation of poverty.

The Pacific Northwest's Columbia watershed demonstrates the complexity of water issues. The river provides a migratory route for salmon, both for leaving their spawning ground to migrate to the ocean, and for returning to exactly that same spot four years later to spawn and die. The river provides economical barge transportation. The many hydro-electric dams along the river's length produce some of the cheapest electrical rates in the country. But remember that the dams and the pools behind them do not provide river flow that is beneficial to fingerling salmon as they migrate to the sea. In addition, the dams are barriers to salmon migrating upstream. Fish ladders have attempted to alleviate the problem. The great Grand Coulee Dam and, later, Chief Joseph Dam downriver closed off the migratory patterns of salmon to the upper reaches of the Columbia.

Today, salmon in the Columbia River have decreased substantially. In late 2007 the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission issued a booklet titled: *Celilo Legacy, 1957 – 50 years of silence – 2007*. Celilo Falls was a traditional fishing spot for the native peoples for millennia as the salmon migrated to the upper reaches of the Columbia River system. Celilo Falls was covered by the pool behind a recently constructed dam. The tradition of the native peoples

fishing at the Falls has disappeared. There has even been a suggestion in the Northwest that the four dams on the lower Snake River be breached to allow a freer flowing river for the migration of salmon.

This system also supports economical barge transportation for farmers, which would be impossible if the dams were breached. An economic boon for wheat farmers becomes a liability for those who wish to see increased salmon runs. Our Columbia River Pastoral Letter attempted to encourage dialogue and prudent decisions as we face the future. Development of salmon habitat as well as attempts to enhance the populations of salmon is moving ahead.

3. Energy: Consumption, Renewability, and Sustainability. Energy demand on our planet continues to increase, exemplified for example by the economic development in China. Coal, gas, and oil in the earth's crust are limited resources. The dramatic increase of oil prices recently has raised very serious concerns from several different perspectives.

In November 2001, Archbishop Renato Martino, President of the Pontifical Council for Peace and Justice, reflected upon the issue of sustainability. He stated:

“Nature required one million years to produce the amount of fossil fuel that humanity burns in only one year. The activities of 25 percent of the world's population are responsible for almost 75 percent of the global emission of greenhouse gases.....”

“Perhaps we need a ‘third revolution’ in which we use our knowledge once again. Instead of burning coal and wood, we must begin to burn knowledge so that finally the people of the world will count for more than they produce, that the human person will truly be the center of our concerns for sustainable development. We should not become a civilization that knows the price of everything and the value of nothing.”

Clearly, the world is becoming more sensitive to the issue of energy consumption. For example, there has been considerable development of more efficient usage of electricity for lighting of homes and streets. There is even now discussion that incandescent bulbs should be eliminated entirely. Hybrid cars, increased demand for higher mileage per gallon cars, wind farms that produce electricity, the harnessing of water in both rivers and the ocean, are just some of the areas of exploration for sustainability and renewability of energy. More efficient homes and sensitivity to consumptive lifestyles should and must be items of concern and research as we look to the future.

Some have said that the next big world crisis will move from oil to water. Increasing commentary on the growing problems of water scarcity and competition raises the seriousness of the issue.

4. Climate Change. Cardinal Martino in his talk to the United Nations in 2001 spoke of this challenge:

“This force of [nature] has brought about the greenhouse effect and the scientific community at large, is now in broad agreement as to the implications of this man-enhanced phenomenon. Indeed, there is a new and stronger evidence that most of the warming observed over the last 50 years is attributed to human activities and that coming changes will effect all aspects of the environment and societal well-being, especially for the poor, the vulnerable and the generations yet unborn.”

In 2001, the US Catholic Bishops issued a statement: *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good*. In that statement, the bishops wrote:

“At its core, global climate change is not about economic theory but political platforms, nor about partisan advantage or interest group pressures. It is about the future of God’s creation and the one human family. It is about protecting both the human environment and the natural environment.”

During his Angelus address on August 27, 2006, Pope Benedict XVI called for a commitment to care for creation. He said: “Creation is exposed to serious risks by life choices and lifestyles that can be harmful.”

The debate over climate change is characterized by polarization involving powerful stakeholders. The misuse of science, personal interests, and agendas are some of the factors that must be addressed by a persistent effort to appreciate the common good and help others discover it. We hope the discussion now can move beyond whether the climate is changing and engage in a discussion of the magnitude, dimension, and consequences of this change. Who are affected, and who are bearing the burden? The focus must move on to specific actions,--what to do and what to stop, finding productive solutions, and facing realistically the costs.

5. Concern for the Poor. In 1997, in his address at the Conference on Environment and Health, Pope John Paul II commented:

“Today, we often witness the taking of opposite and exaggerated positions: on the one hand in the name of the exhaustibility and insufficiency of environmental resources, demands are made to limit the birth rate, especially among the poor and developing peoples.... The balance of the ecosystem and the difference of the healthiness of the environment, really need human responsibility and a responsibility that must be open to new forms of solidarity. An open and comprehensive solidarity with all peoples is essential, founded on the respect for life and the promotion of sufficient resources for the poorest and for future generations.”

In 2006, his successor, Pope Benedict XVI, had this to say:

“Environmental degradation makes the life of the poor especially unbearable.”

In October, 2007, Archbishop Celestino Migliore, at the Conference on Sustainable Development at the United Nations, spoke forcefully:

“We must consider how in most countries today, it is the poor and the powerless who most directly bear the brunt of environmental degradation. Unable to do otherwise, they live in polluted lands, near toxic waste dumps, or squat in public lands and other people’s properties without any access to basic services. Subsistence farmers clear woodlands and forests in order to survive. Their efforts to eke out a bare existence perpetuate a vicious circle of poverty and environmental degradation. Indeed, extreme want is not only the work of all pollutions; it is also a great polluter.”

In the Northwest bishops’ pastoral letter on the Columbia River, they also comment about our sensitivity to everyone in the region:

“In our hope-filled social region for the watershed, we see working people engaged in productive employment at living wages and renewed communities integrated with their environment. In that hope-filled vision, we see workers providing for their own needs and it is through the sacrifice of compassion, helping to provide for the needs of the elderly, the young, the unemployed and underemployed, and the poor. There, regional goods are distributed justly to meet regional needs and local economies prosper. Community consciousness is ever aware of and community conscience provides for the needs of the poor, weak and vulnerable, the least of the brethren loved by Jesus.”  
(Matthew 25: 31-46)

In their suggestions for implementation of the pastoral letter, the Northwest bishops list a fifth consideration for community caretaking: “Promote Justice for the poor, linking economic justice and environmental justice.” They state:

“The poor suffer more than other segments of the population from job loss, low wages, poor working conditions, and environmental degradation. The Church, in the spirit of Christ, exercises a preferential, but not exclusive, option for the poor; that is, we are called as a people to help them acquire justice, respect, and an inherent sense of dignity, and to participate in transforming economic and political structures to create a just society and a sustainable environment.”

Remember that the greatest impact of climate change will be felt by those who contributed least to its cause. Those who are the most vulnerable and who have the least resources and ability to cope, will often face the greatest threats and experience the greatest hardship. Central to the Church's social teaching is the dignity of the human person. The seven principles of the Church's social teaching include the care of creation and the option for the poor.

The Church's holistic approach in her social teaching stands as a strong call for all humanity to live up to the principles that enhance the common good and enrich the lives of each individual. We have much work to do integrating that teaching into the life of our Church and into our society at large.

6. Vision for the Future. In light of Pope Benedict XVI's recent encyclical, "Saved by Hope," we are called to be people of hope in a world that sometimes experiences darkness and gloom, alienation and violence. In his address to the Conference on Environment and Health in March, 1997, Pope John Paul II mentions this sense of hopefulness:

"Technology that pollutes can also cleanse, production which amasses can also distribute justly, on conditions that the ethic of respect toward life and human dignity, for the rights of today's generations and those to come prevails. This requires firm points of reference and inspiration: a clear knowledge of creation as a work of God's provident wisdom and awareness of human dignity and responsibility and the plan of creation."

In October 2007, Archbishop Migliore addressed the United Nations:

"However, all is not gloom. Encouraging signs of greater public awareness of the inter-relatedness of the challenges we face have been emerging. The unease created by predictions of disastrous consequences of climate change has awakened individual countries to the urgency of caring for the environment. Environmental degradation caused by certain models of economic development makes many realize that development is not achieved through a mere quantitative increase or production, but through a balanced approach to production, respect for the rights and dignity of workers, and environmental protection."

In that same address, he speaks forcefully about necessary attitudes as we look to the future:

"Laws are not enough to alter behavior. Behavioral change requires personal commitment and the ethical conviction of the value of solidarity. Demands for more equitable relationship between rich and poor countries ... a more caring attitude towards nature can be obtained and maintained with education and a persevering awareness campaign. The more people know about the various aspects of the environmental challenges they face, the better they can respond."

All of this necessitates a conversion of heart. Already in 1997, Pope Paul VI in his message to the Fifth Worldwide Day of Environment said this:

“The intent of such an appeal demands more than just a renewal of effort. It calls for a change of mentality, for a conversion of attitude and of practice so that the rich willingly use less and share the earth’s goods more widely and more wisely. It calls for a simplicity of lifestyle and a society that intelligently conserves rather than needlessly consumes. It calls finally for a universal sense of solidarity in which each person in every nation plays a proper and interdependent role to ensure an ecologically sound environment for people today as well as for future generations.”

In his Letter to the Galatians (6:15), St. Paul challenges us: “All that matters is that one is created anew.” We hope, and we must pray, that this spirit will continue to touch our world. Even more important for us, we pray that those words take even deeper root and become a vibrant witness.

Our commitment cannot waver. Our responsibility is clear. Our mission as the disciples of Jesus continues. In their 1991 statement of *Renewing the Earth*, the U.S. Bishops conclude:

“Saving the planet will demand long and sometimes sacrificial commitment. It will require continuing vision of our political habits, restructuring economic institutions, reshaping society, and nurturing global community. We can proceed with hope because, as at the dawn of creation, so today the Holy Spirit brings new light into all earth’s creatures. Today, we pray with new conviction and concern for all God’s creation: Send forth thy Spirit, Lord, and renew the face of the earth.”

May we all say: “AMEN.”