



CREATION and THE ENVIRONMENT

*A Consensus Statement of
THE COUNCIL of BISHOPS and JUDICATORY EXECUTIVES of
CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATES OF SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA
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We believe that the created world itself is a 'mystery' originating in the sovereign will of God accomplished by the action of the Holy Trinity. We confess that the Father is the "Creator of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible", the Son "He through whom all things were made", and the Holy Spirit, the "Creator of life". Thus, the three persons created together the world, which is the fruit of the common action of the Holy Trinity issuing out of the one essence: the Father who is the "Creator of all things", the Son who is the one "through whom and for whom all things were made", and the Holy Spirit who is the one "in whom are all things". Everything that God had made "was very good ..." (*Gen. 1:31*); "... first He conceived (His creation), and His conception was a work carried out by His Word, and perfectly by His Spirit..." (cf. St. Basil the Great).

"In the beginning" God the Holy Trinity created the world (heaven and earth) "out of nothing" (*ex nihilo*) and not out of some sort of pre-existent matter. The world is a product of God's sovereign and free will, goodness, wisdom, love and omnipotence; God created it freely, without compulsion, in order that it might enjoy His blessings and share in His goodness. God then brought all things into being out of nothing, creating both the visible and the invisible. The world as *cosmos*, i.e. a created order with its own integrity, is a positive reality. It is the good work of the good God (*Gen. 1*), made by God for the blessed existence of humanity. We see that God first creates the world and beautifies it like a palace, and then leads humanity into it. The genesis of the cosmos, "being in becoming", is a mystery for the human mind, a genesis produced by the Word of God. As such, the world is a revelation of God (*Rom. 1:19-20*). The cosmos is a coherent whole, a created synthesis, because all its elements are united and interrelated in time and space. A serious study of the mystery of God's creation, through faith, prayer, meditation and science, will make a positive contribution to the recognition of the integrity of creation and the need of our care for it.

Human beings are not only God's creation, but they are the ultimate or crowning event of God's creation, for human beings were made "...in the

image and likeness of God...” (*Gen* 1:26 ff); the reference to “the image of God” is to be understood in terms of Jesus Christ, since He is explicitly identified with it (*2 Cor*.4:4; *Col*. 1:15; *Heb*. 1:3 ff). Thus, for human beings to be in the image of God means to be in Christ, or assimilated to Christ. This is a matter of the grace of God and the action of God; it is not a “matter of nature”, because only Christ is by nature God's image, Christ being God's eternal and natural offspring, His only begotten Son.

The value of God's creation is then seen not only in the fact that it is intrinsically good, but also in the fact that it is appointed by God to be the home for living beings. The value of the natural creation is revealed in the fact that it was made for God's purpose; it was to serve God's creatures that were made in God's image and likeness; and it was ultimately to be the context for God's Incarnation and humanity's restoration to communion with God in that calling to be God's image and likeness; and as such, it was made to be for the beginning of the actualization of the Kingdom of God. It can be said that the cosmos provides the stage upon which humankind moves from creation to that ultimate restoration. Therefore, the whole of the creation is ultimately destined to become a transfigured world, since the salvation of humankind necessarily involves the salvation of its natural home, the cosmos.

Before their fall the first human beings experienced the creation as one harmonious whole. It was like a beautiful garden (*paradeisos*, *Gen*. 2:8) given to them to tend with care and love. The human fall, however, which was essentially a sinful exercising of human freedom, introduced forces of disintegration into the body of creation. As a consequence of sin, humanity experienced a three-fold alienation.

- Firstly, humanity was estranged from the Creator (cf. *Gen*. 3:8).
- Secondly, human beings became alienated and estranged from one another, and even within themselves (cf. *Genesis* 4:8 ff;).
- Thirdly, humanity lost its capacity to enter into a proper relationship with nature as well as with the whole of the creation (cf. *Genesis* 3:17 ff; see also *Genesis* 4:10-11).

Enmity between the natural world and human beings replaced the proper and original relationship of harmony and care. Domination and exploitation of the creation for selfish ends by greedy human beings became the order of history. Thus, manifold forms of disintegration set in, which converged in the reality of death and corruption. The “fear of death” instilled anxiety, acquisitiveness, greed, hatred and despair in human beings. Modern forms of economic exploitation, racial oppression, social inequalities, war, genocide,

among other things, are all consequences of the “fear of death”, as well as collective signs of the reality of death and the condition of sin and death that human beings inherit.

God’s created world, in and of itself in its unredeemed condition, is measurably headed for death; the created world shares with human beings the intrinsic need for the reality of God’s salvation. Christians proclaim that reality of salvation; in and through the Incarnate God, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father “... made known His will ... as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him (Christ), things in heaven and things on earth...” (*Eph.* 1:10). Jesus Christ, the Son of God became man, and restored and renewed humanity and the whole of the creation, uniting both of them with the Creator in and through Himself. One of the Trinity, thus, became Incarnate, became man, as such revealing his Lordship over the whole of the creation, and showing humanity a Lordship in stewardship and service. From the very earliest of the Christian experience of the Lord’s crucifixion, death and resurrection, it was understood that “... all of creation suffered with the Creator on the Cross...” (see *Romans* 8:26 ff); and therefore, all of God’s creation is redeemed, restored for the serving of God’s purpose. The Lord Jesus Christ is the only Deliverer of human beings from that condition that is otherwise faced, and He is the Deliverer as well of His creation.

We therefore know that God is the creator of all that exists, a world that was beautifully and wonderfully made, a fitting manifestation of His glory (cf. *Ps.* 103 [104]); but we stand today also within a wounded creation, one which suffers under distorted conditions which are the result of sin. In our selfishness and greed we have used our otherwise good technological abilities to exploit God’s creation, to destroy the “balance of nature” and to deform what God originally made to be in wholesome communion with us and with Him. Creation is no longer integrated with humanity, nor is it in harmony with God. The creation needs to be reintegrated, but this can happen only as it is brought once again into communion with the Lord, so that it may find in Him its fullness of purpose and its transfiguration. Humanity can no longer ignore its responsibility to protect it and preserve it. In order to do this, however, humanity must learn to treat the creation as a sacred offering to God, an oblation, a vehicle of grace, an incarnation of our most noble aspirations and prayers.

Simply said, the environmental crisis is a sin; it is the sin of our not being “faithful stewards” over that which is entrusted to us by God; like all sin, it ruptures our relationship with God; like all sin, it is a judgment

upon humanity; like all sin, it requires repentance before God. We need to find ways, as churches, to support sound programs which seek to preserve from pollution the air, the water, and the land around which we live. To speak of the reintegration of creation today is first to speak words of repentance and to make commitments of stewardship, commitments toward the formation of a new way of living for the whole of humanity. The contemporary world must repent for the abuses which have been imposed upon the “natural world”, seeing it in the same kind of relationship to us as we see the unity of our human nature in both body and soul. We must begin to undo the pollution and disruption we have caused, which brings death and destruction to the mineral, vegetable and animal dimensions of the world.

For ourselves, this means a recommitment to “the simple life” which is content with “... our daily bread...” (cf. *Matthew* 6:9-15) and sees unnecessary luxuriousness as the deprivation of necessities owed to the poor (cf. *Luke* 16:19-31, “the Rich Man and Lazarus”), among other things. In all of its aspects, this concern for the reintegration of the creation calls Christians to a new affirmation of self-discipline, a recovery and renewal of the spirit of the authentic Christian practice of self-denial as a tool for overcoming that self-indulgent luxuriousness (this tool is classically called “Christian asceticism”). This calling is for every Christian regardless of person, status, position or condition. In short, we must see the created world as our own home, and see every person in it as our brother and sister whom Christ loves and for whom Christ died.

As Christians, it must be clear that we are not and cannot be exclusively identified with any single ecological movement, party, or organization, either with regard to ideology, philosophy or methodology; at the same time it must be equally clear that we actively seek real solutions to the ecological problems that we face, and do so through the vision of human beings’ relationships with God, with each other, and with the created nature, that vision that God has given to us.

We call upon individuals, churches, and nations to labor to recover the vision of the rightful harmony between the human dimension on the one hand, and the mineral, plant and animal dimensions of the creation that God has given for our use. The lack of attention by human beings to that essential stewardship of God’s creation has created various conditions which, today, together present what can accurately be called an “environmental crisis”:

- Environmental issues like air and water pollution, depletion of non-renewable resources, destruction of the ozone layer, increasing nuclear radiation, the major loss of forest lands and “making deserts” out of otherwise productive areas, among other things, threaten life itself on this planet.
- The gifts of science and technology are being misused by human beings to the extent of abusing nature and even turning today's life on earth into a hell, not only for the many millions of existing people but also for the generations to come.
- The voices of those who call for just development, just distribution of resources, and just ecological life-styles are being ignored or even suppressed.
- Advances in bio-technology and genetic engineering, while offering great potential good, also run the risk of initiating biological disruption leading to disastrous mutations that are extremely dangerous for the true life on earth; it is critical that all technology be seen in the light of God's revelation, as the Holy Spirit has given it to us, because without adequate knowledge of God's calling to human beings and the essential spiritual nature of human beings, all technology is at risk for misuse, abuse, and use in opposition to God's will.
- We must work in every way possible in our different situations to encourage the scientists and politicians to dedicate the good potentials of science and technology to the restoration of the earth's integrity.

Like everything else in this fallen world, technology can only accurately be described as “ambiguous”. That is: if it is used for the doing of God's work it can have great value; however, if its use is not grounded in the seeking of God's will, it can cause great harm to God's creatures. Similarly, while human creativity and freedom can be seen as superlative gifts of God, it should also be emphasized that their use and function must be rooted and grounded in divine wisdom, which is acquired only by a life of seeking to acquire the Holy Spirit by “...seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness...” (cf. *Matthew* 6:33).

In being created in God's own image and likeness, human beings received the calling from God to offer back to God that which God has given, in the

terms of the doing of God's will (cf. "... Thine own of Thine own, we offer unto Thee, in behalf of all, and for all ...", *Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*). We therefore acknowledge that, in all things, we are called to offer the whole of God's creation back to Him sacramentally, as an offering cleansed, purified, restored for His sanctification of it, so that it may be utilized for the accomplishing of God's will within the world, to the glory of His Holy name.