



RECONCILIATION WITH CREATION



Draft framework towards an Environmental Policy for The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago

Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth. Psalm 104:30.

This *draft framework towards an Environmental Policy for the Archdiocese* is being circulated for consultation by the Catholic Commission for Social Justice (CCSJ), on behalf of the Catholic Church in T&T. It will be published in a 4-page pull-out supplement in Catholic News on 14 March, 2010. Hard copies of a 4-page Executive Summary, a 6 page Reference Section to the draft framework, and a more detailed supporting document are available on request from CCSJ's Office. All are currently accessible on CCSJ's website: www.rcsocialjusticett.org.

The consultation period will run from Tues 23 Feb. - 30 June, 2010. All comments are welcome. These will inform the preparation of the Archdiocese's Environmental Policy. Inter alia, the document is intended as a study guide and action plan for all people of goodwill. Comments can be submitted via e-mail at: rcsocjus@carib-link.net, verbally, or in writing to Leela Ramdeen, Chair, CCSJ, Justice Desk, Archbishop's House, 27 Maraval Road, Port of Spain. Tel: 290 1635 or 299 8945.

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FOREWORD FROM ARCHBISHOP EDWARD J. GILBERT C.Ss.R FOR DRAFT FRAMEWORK TOWARDS AN ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY FOR THE ARCHDIOCESE

The decision of the Catholic Commission for Social Justice to fulfill resolution 6 of the Third Sitting of the Archdiocesan Synod by opening a consultation process to develop an Environmental Policy for the Archdiocese of Port of Spain is an important step in making the actions of the Synod known not only to the Archdiocese but also to the entire Nation.

I am very willing to accept the invitation to write a brief introduction to the Draft for the consultation which is entitled, “Reconciliation with Creation.”

The theology of the Catholic Church on the Environment is voluminous. There are scholars who have specialized in the field of creation, environment and ecology all of their lives. The division of theology on Creation is an ethical or moral category in Church teaching.

While the Church accepts in principle the established data of science on creation, the Church approaches the interrelated issues of creation, environment and ecology primarily from the viewpoint of theology – Sacred Scripture, Tradition and the Magisterium. The logical questions are where would an interested

person find this teaching in general and where is its application to particular cultures and situations to be found?

The answer to that question is on four levels: 1) Papal Teaching; 2) The Compendium of Social Doctrine of the Church; 3) The teaching of the Vatican Department called the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace; and 4) The Teaching of the Conferences of Bishops throughout the World.


A dedicated scholar could spend her or his entire professional life studying, digesting and sharing this theology. Since most people would never have the time to dedicate themselves to such a project, it is the responsibility of particular churches (dioceses) to communicate the message to the people.

It is important to note that the theology of stewardship for creation is the basis of the motivation for taking the practical steps to protect the environment. Unless people are properly motivated, there is little hope they will persevere in the long term process of protecting and sustaining the environment.

Resolution 6 from the Synod gives three practical ways for teaching and witnessing to the theology of the Church on the Environment: the family, the school and the parish. The Environmental Policy for the Archdiocese and the specific help from the Social Justice Commission will provide material for reflection for families, schools and parishes.

The journey of environmental education and action will not be easy. Although consensus is developing among scientific experts, we shall have to face challenges: indifference among the general population and even resistance due to national, regional and international economic pressures. However, Gospel values must be preached. It is our responsibility to future generations to use every means at our disposal to preach it well.

May God bless the efforts of the Social Justice Commission with success!

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Edward J. Gilbert". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the left.

Most Reverend Edward J. Gilbert C.Ss.R.

Archbishop of Port of Spain

February 25, 2010.

B. Objectives of the *Draft framework towards an Environmental Policy for the Archdiocese:*

“...how vital it is to respect the ecology of nature, if we are not to cause serious harm to the world which future generations will receive from us”. (Pope Benedict XVI)

1. To bring the Gospel and the teachings of the Catholic Church to bear on the issue of environmental/ecological justice.
2. To raise awareness of the Catholic Church’s commitment to promote human and environmental ecology as key elements to achieve authentic development for humankind and for all of creation.
3. To identify resources and practical ways in which individuals, parishes, schools, the public and private sectors in Trinidad and Tobago can reconcile themselves with God’s creation.
4. To motivate individuals and organizations to take responsibility to “cultivate and care for” God’s creation (Gen 2:15).

C. The Church’s teaching on humankind’s relationship with the environment

The Catholic Church in Trinidad and Tobago is concerned to protect and promote authentic integral human development and environmental ecology which are both inextricably linked. Creation is the work of God and is God’s gift to us. As stated in Genesis 1, God created everything – the heaven, the earth, the birds, the plants, the land, the ocean, and “God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good” (Gen. 1:31)

Man and woman were created in God’s image and likeness and given the responsibility to “cultivate and care for” God’s Creation (Genesis 2:15). The Catholic Church has always urged humankind to care for, preserve, develop and restore the environment. The teaching of the Magisterium on this issue is clear. The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church reminds us that we are charged to care for “its harmony and development.” (n. 451).

Our responsibility as stewards of God’s creation must be placed within the context of the mystery of the Incarnation of God, which, as St Ambrose says “is the salvation of the whole of Creation”. And in Colossians 1:15-20 we read: “all things have been created through him and

for him. He himself is before all things and in him all things hold together, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of the cross.”

We are one human family and while we seek to address environmental issues that impact on us now, let us remember that we are not to hand over to future generations God’s creation depleted of its resources. (cf. Gen 1:4,10,12,18,21,25). (Gen 1,27). Gen 1:31), (cf. Gen 1:26-30). The “common good” includes a concern for those who will come after us.

A call to reflection and action/Pope John Paul II: The ecological crisis - a moral issue: This draft framework is a call to reflection and action if we are to address the environmental crisis which, as Pope John Paul II stated in 1990, is, at its core, a moral challenge. “When the ecological crisis is set within the broader context of the search for peace within society, we can understand better the importance of giving attention to what the earth and its atmosphere are telling us: namely, that there is an order in the universe which must be respected, and that the human person, endowed with the capability of choosing freely, has a grave responsibility to preserve this order for the well-being of future generations. . . . The ecological crisis is a moral issue.” (Pope John Paul II, World Day of Peace Message: Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All Creation – also known as: The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility (1990)).

Environmental stewardship in the Catechism of the Catholic Church: See 340, 1333, 1359, 1361, 1604, and 2415.

The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church: a correct understanding of the environment: The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church is critical of human beings’ “pretension of exercising unconditional dominion over things” (n. 461). The environment, it says, should not be reduced “to a mere object to be manipulated and exploited...A correct understanding of the environment prevents the utilitarian reduction of nature to a mere object to be manipulated and exploited. At the same time, it must not absolutize nature and place it above the dignity of the human person himself... (n 463).

“The bonds that unite the world to God have...been broken. This rupture has also resulted in separating *human beings* from the world and, more radically, has impoverished *human beings*’ very identity. They find themselves thinking that they are foreign to the environmental context in which they live. The consequences resulting from this are all too clear: ‘it is the relationship *human beings* have with God that determines their relationship with each other and with their environment...There is a need to place ever greater emphasis on the intimate connection between environmental ecology and ‘*human ecology*’”(n464, 466). See also: 457 and 487.

While advances in science and technology have benefited humanity, they have also caused/contributed to some harmful effects such as climate change, global warming, the depletion of the ozone layer, desertification, deforestation, the extinction of species, the generation and disposal of toxic and nuclear waste. Inter alia, pollution of the environment and the overuse of resources, particularly non-renewable resources, have serious consequences for people's health and well-being and for our home, Planet Earth.

Pope Benedict XVI urges us to act to protect the Environment: *"Our earth speaks to us, and we must listen if we want to survive."* (Pope Benedict XVI , 24 July 2007)

Articles 48 – 51 of Pope Benedict XVI's third encyclical, *Charity in Truth* (2009), focus specifically on environmental issues. The Pope reminds us that: "The environment is God's gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole. When nature, including the *human being*, is viewed as the result of mere chance or evolutionary determinism, our sense of responsibility wanes." (48)

The Holy Father said in his 2010 World Day of Peace Message entitled: *If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation*: "The Church has a responsibility towards creation, and she considers it her duty to exercise that responsibility in public life, in order to protect earth, water and air as gifts of God the Creator meant for everyone, and above all to save *humankind* from the danger of self-destruction...when 'human ecology' is respected within society, environmental ecology also benefits". Young people cannot be asked to respect the environment if they are not helped, within families and society as a whole, to respect themselves.

"The book of nature is one and indivisible; it includes not only the environment but also individual, family and social ethics. Our duties towards the environment flow from our duties towards the person, considered both individually and in relation to others...The quest for peace by people of good will surely would become easier if all acknowledge the indivisible relationship between God, human beings and the whole of creation." (12,14)).

He says: "We cannot remain indifferent to what is happening around us; for the deterioration of any one part of the planet affects us all...integral human development is closely linked to the obligations which flow from *human beings' relationship with the natural environment*...Our present crises – be they economic, food-related, environmental or social – are ultimately also **moral** crises and all of them are interrelated..."

"Can we remain indifferent before the problems associated with such realities as climate change, desertification, the deterioration and loss of productivity in vast agricultural areas, the pollution of rivers and aquifers, the loss of biodiversity, the increase of natural catastrophes and the deforestation of

equatorial and tropical regions? Can we disregard the growing phenomenon of “environmental refugees,” people who are forced by the degradation of their natural habitat to forsake it – and often their possessions as well – in order to face the dangers and uncertainties of forced displacement? Can we remain impassive in the face of actual and potential conflicts involving access to natural resources?”

“It is becoming more and more evident that the issue of environmental degradation challenges us to examine our lifestyle and the prevailing models of consumption and production, which are often unsustainable from a social, environmental and even economic point of view...Protecting the natural environment in order to build a world of peace is thus a duty incumbent upon each and all. It is an urgent challenge, one to be faced with renewed and concerted commitment; it is also a providential opportunity to hand down to coming generations the prospect of a better future for all.”

Bishops of the Antilles Episcopal Conference (AEC): AEC Bishops have issued 2 key Pastoral Letters in 2003 and 2005: “*Stewardship and the revitalization of parish life in the Caribbean*” and “*Caring for the Earth – Our responsibility*.” The Bishops recognize that “stewardship” is a wider concept than using time, talent and treasure to build up parish communities. They said:

“The truth is that all human beings are called to be stewards, stewards of God’s gift of creation, the primary sacrament of His love. To thankfully take responsibility for the integrity of creation is an important part of what it means to be made in God’s image (Genesis 1, especially 26-31). We constantly need to be reminded, and to proclaim to the world: ‘The earth and its fullness belong to the Lord, the world and all that dwell in it.’ (Psalm 24:1) We are all in the world not as owners but as tenants and stewards...God is sovereign of all that exists and has instilled in every creature, including humans, laws and purposes which must be observed.”

Planet Earth, our home/Pope Paul VI: man’s ill-considered exploitation of nature: Humankind’s lack of understanding of the interdependence of creation has led to conflict between the environment as ‘resource’ and the environment as ‘home’. In 1971 Pope Paul VI stated: “*Human beings* are suddenly becoming aware that by an ill-considered exploitation of nature they risk destroying it and becoming in their turn the victim of this degradation. Not only is the material environment becoming a permanent menace -- pollution and refuse, new illness and absolute destructive capacity -- but the human framework is no longer under *human beings*’ control, thus creating an environment for tomorrow which may well be intolerable. This is a wide-ranging social problem which concerns the entire human family.”

D. The Archdiocese's Mission and Synod Resolutions on the Environment

The Archdiocese's Mission Statement is inclusive. It states: "We are the people of God in Trinidad and Tobago, building the Civilization of Love - reconciliation with God, neighbour, **creation** and self - through: The New Evangelization, Revitalizing Catholic Culture and Identity, Regenerating the Moral and Spiritual Values of our Society."

Synod Resolutions:

- Resolution #3a states: "The Archdiocese to dedicate a week every year to the theme of 'Respect for Life'". It is important to note that the call to respect life is a call to respect **ALL** of creation.
- Resolution #6 states: "Be it resolved that in keeping with the Catholic position on Creation, our families, schools and parishes recognize our responsibility as stewards of Creation and express this in relevant tangible ways.

Res: 6:1: The Archdiocese to formulate a policy and guidelines on environmental awareness;

Res: 6:3: Organize/encourage participation in events that promote good stewardship of God's creation e.g. turtle watching, reforestation/replanting of trees, beach cleanup etc.

Res: 6:4 The Archdiocese to take action to promote the Church as a 'green' Church, for example, by raising awareness of how our daily choices affect the environment; encouraging the faithful to avoid being wasteful, to re-use items where necessary, and to recycle.

Res: 6:5: Establish an agricultural programme in Catholic Schools and parishes Identify one or two Parishes that will be willing to establish an agricultural project."

E. Putting our faith into action to restore right relationships between humankind and creation: (reflection/action process)

We need to take action where we are, for example, in our parishes, schools, work environment, and communities. The **SEE, JUDGE/REFLECT, ACT PROCESS** is intended as a guide for decision-making about current social issues. Further information on the process can be obtained from the website of the *Office of Social Justice, Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, USA* (www.osjspm.org). Hard copies are also available from CCSJ's Office at Archbishop's House.

Helpful framework: US Bishops' Pastoral Statement: Renewing the Earth : The US Bishops 1991 Pastoral Statement: *Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching* provides a helpful framework for parishes, schools and communities. (See: www.usccb.org/sdwp/ejp/bishopsstatement.shtml).

Seven themes of ecological responsibility: In their Statement, the US Bishops propose 7 themes of ecological responsibility. These themes, which are drawn from Catholic social teaching, are useful for “religious teaching and moral debate” (Bishops of New Mexico):

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

F. Some environmental issues in Trinidad and Tobago (T&T)

Promotion of Biodiversity and eco-tourism: We are blessed in T&T with rich biological diversity but we must do more to conserve it. The United Nation has declared 2010 the International Year of Biodiversity. During 2010 the Environmental Management Authority (EMA) in T&T will organize a number of activities and programmes to “enhance public education and awareness and to promote the protection of biodiversity.” The EMA states in its 2010 Calendar:

“Biodiversity is the foundation upon which all human life is maintained. Yet, biodiversity loss is occurring at a rapid rate. Over the past 50 years, humans have changed ecosystems faster and more extensively than in any comparable period of time in human history. Species are going extinct at 1,000 times the rates typical of Earth's past.”

As part of T&T's plan to develop tourism T&T is promoting eco-tourism. Yet some areas of our environment are under threat.

Threats to T&T's environment: Each year we see the ways in which ecological destruction impacts on us and on our lives. We must play our part to address environmental issues in T&T also, for example: oil pollution of beaches; water pollution from effluents such as agricultural chemicals, industrial wastes, and raw sewage; deforestation; soil erosion; flooding caused in part by the littering of our waterways; destruction of our mangroves, wetlands and coral reefs; illegal forestry and quarrying; unsustainable hunting; and unplanned construction.

“An increase in the unmanaged development of hillsides is causing environmental, social and economic problems in Trinidad and Tobago. Improved environmental awareness and deepening environmental concerns in recent years have focused attention on the need to move towards a more sustainable pattern of development.” (Baban, SMJ, Thomas, D, Canisius, F & Sant, KJ 2007, 'Managing development in the hillsides of Trinidad and Tobago using geoinformatics', *Sustainable Development*).

“Slash and Burn” (cutting down and burning trees in order to clear land for temporary agriculture) which is practised in T&T as a method of farming, can harm biodiversity, pollute the air and make the ground infertile. “Forest fires have taken their toll on Trinidad’s forests, especially on the slopes and ridges of the Northern Range. Most are the products of ‘slash and burn’ agriculture, which has consequently led to large areas of secondary growth forest... Mining which results in a loss of topsoil, vegetation and fauna is of particular environmental concern.” (See: The Encyclopaedia of Earth).

While T&T is blessed with a wide range of flora, fauna and wildlife, there are a number of endangered species in T&T, for example, the gentle manatee. The Encyclopedia of the Nations states: “Endangered species on Trinidad include the Trinidad piping guan (Pawi), tundra peregrine falcon, loggerhead turtle, and red siskin.”

G. Action to achieve reconciliation with God’s Creation

This draft framework urges each person to commit himself/herself to stand in solidarity with God’s creation. Together, let us meet the challenge of putting our faith into action. The following tips, which are not exhaustive, should assist us as we seek to reconcile ourselves with God’s Creation:

- **Read, Pray, Reflect on the story of Creation in Genesis.**

To develop an environmental spirituality, see resources in the supporting document to this draft framework (www.rcsocialjusticett.org). As individuals or in study/prayer

groups/parish groups, pray for a conversion of heart – what Pope John Paul II called an “ecological conversion”.

- **Look around, discover and reflect on the beauty of God’s creation and of our connection to it – locally and globally.** In his 1990 Message for World Day of Peace, Pope John Paul II wrote: “Our very contact with nature has a deep restorative power; contemplation of its magnificence imparts peace and serenity”.

For reflection: See Marjorie Padmore’s Song: *God bless our Nation*: “God bless our isles of tropic beauty rare/ Of flaming poinciana and shady immortelle/The warm and sparkling waters/ That beat upon our shores/ Beat out a tune that seem to tell/We take a pride in Our Liberty.”

Reflect also on the line in T&T’s National Anthem: “...this our native land, we pledge our lives to thee...”

- **Learn about and educate others on the causes and effects of environmental degradation and about action that can be taken to promote the integrity of creation and to reconcile ourselves with God’s creation.** See **Lenten Carbon Fast 2010**: www.lcwr.org/lcwrsocialjustice/eoclentcalendar2010.pdf
- **Examine and assess your lifestyle and consumption. Pledge to make changes that will improve the ways in which you impact on and interact with the environment.**
- **Strive to live simply.**
- **Reuse, Recycle, Reduce, Restore. Practise these 4 R’s for sustainable living.** As far as possible to buy products from recycled materials.
- **Prevent Pollution and Reduce Your Carbon Footprint** e.g. plant a tree(s), use reusable bags, eat less meat.
- **Become an Advocate for God’s Creation.**
- **Enjoy nature and live in harmony with it.** This is God’s plan for His creation.
- **Evaluate the impact of your activities on the environment.** See Catholic Earthcare Australia - <http://www.catholicearthcareoz.net/audit.html> - to find out how to conduct an environmental audit in your parish, home, school, and community.
- **Promote sound environmental management practices/best practice in ecological stewardship,** e.g. energy efficiency: replace electric bulbs with energy efficient ones,

turn off lights when you leave an empty room, unplug appliances such as cell phone chargers when not in use, use clotheslines instead of a dryer ; water conservation: fix leaky pipes, take shorter showers ; waste avoidance: buy smart e.g. items with little packaging; composting your food waste; using environmentally responsible products; and car-pooling.

- **Assist in implementing Synod Resolutions**, for example Res: 6:3: Organize/encourage participation in events that promote good stewardship of God’s creation e.g. turtle watching, reforestation/replanting of trees, beach cleanup etc. Organising/getting involved in clean-up activities and promoting anti-litter campaigns help to build pride in our communities and in our country.

In 2009 CCSJ organised turtle watching trips to Matura. A number of Confirmation Classes organised their own trips to Matura to watch leatherback turtles lay their eggs. This is one way of developing our awareness of the awesome nature of God’s gifts to us.

- **Consider establishing/supporting the establishment of an agricultural programme** – including compost making and tree planting, in your parish and your local Catholic primary and secondary school. Urban schools can use pots for planting if there is no green space around the schools (see the Government’s ‘Grow Box’ scheme). We should promote food security in T&T and encourage people to buy locally grown food. Tons of fossil fuel are used to transport food from far-away places. (see Synod Res. 6:5).
- **Plan activities to mark *UN International Days*, e.g. *World Environment Day on June 5*, and the Archdiocese’s *Respect for Life Week* each year.**
- **Schools and catechetical teams** should “Integrate into formal education and lifelong learning the knowledge, values and skills needed for a sustainable way of life” (Earth Charter). (These could also be promoted through non-formal education and youth work). Environmental issues can be addressed in all areas of the curriculum. Activities could include: debating sessions, quizzes, poetry/essay writing, making/displaying posters, photographic exhibitions of the natural environment, agricultural projects (see ‘d’ above), field trips/eco-tours, and providing opportunities for students to practice the 4 Rs for sustainable living in their communities.
- As a key institution in the Archdiocese, the **Catholic Religious Education Development Institute (CREDI)** should promote environmental awareness among its students and encourage relevant research that will facilitate the mission of the church in its efforts to promote reconciliation with creation.

NB: This list is intended to highlight key areas for action to demonstrate our solidarity with all of creation. You can add your own creative ideas. Let us be transformed by God's grace to a new humanity. May God bless our efforts.

H. St Francis pledge to care for God's creation and the poor and

vulnerable: (see <http://catholicclimatecovenant.org/the-st-francis-pledge/>)

“Environmental pollution is making particularly unsustainable the lives of the poor of the world...we must pledge ourselves to take care of creation and to share its resources in solidarity.” (Pope Benedict XVI during his Angelus address on Sunday, Aug. 27, 2006).

“I/We Pledge to:

- **PRAY** and reflect on the duty to care for God's Creation and protect the poor and vulnerable.
- **LEARN** about and educate others on the causes and moral dimensions of climate change.
- **ASSESS** how we-as individuals and in our families, parishes and other affiliations-contribute to climate change by our own energy use, consumption, waste, etc.
- **ACT** to change our choices and behaviours to reduce the ways we contribute to climate change.
- **ADVOCATE** for Catholic principles and priorities in climate change discussions and decisions, especially as they impact those who are poor and vulnerable.”